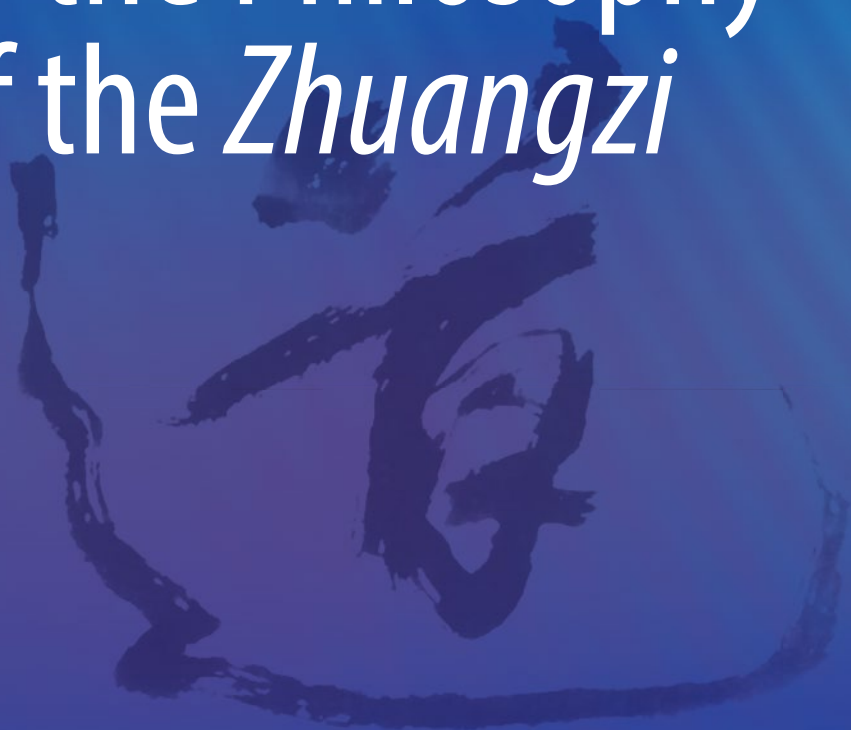


Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy 16

Kim-chong Chong *Editor*

# Dao Companion to the Philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*



Springer

# **Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy**

## **Volume 16**

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Kim-chong Chong

Editor

Dao Companion  
to the Philosophy  
of the *Zhuangzi*



Springer



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ISSN 2211-0275

ISSN 2542-8780 (electronic)

Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy

ISBN 978-3-030-92330-3

ISBN 978-3-030-92331-0 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92331-0>

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## Editor's Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the following people and organizations: Yong HUANG, General Editor of the Dao Companion series, for his advice and help at various stages of this project; Chienkuo Mr, Head of the Department of Philosophy at Soochow University (Taipei), for his long-time support, making possible earlier appointments as Visiting Professor; and as Kuang-Yi LIU Chair Professor in 2020–2021, an endowment of the Building Futures Foundation (USA). And last but not least, special thanks are due to the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, for providing a subvention toward a part of the project.

The talks on Zhuangzi that I gave at Soochow University and at Fudan University (Shanghai) helped to develop my own chapter contribution for the present volume. Colleagues at the latter's School of Philosophy, which I visited as Fudan Fellow in October–November 2019, were warm and hospitable: Bai Tongdong, Cai Qinghua, Chang Tzuli, Lin Hongxing (Dongfang Shuo), and Xu Bo. My former colleague, Chen Jianhua, now at the Chinese Classics Research Institute in Fudan, was very generous with his hospitality. My wife and I have happy memories of the companionship and help of Ji Lei, then a graduate student in the School of Philosophy, and Zhang Rongkun at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology. Finally, a big “thank you!” to the three anonymous scholars who devoted their precious time to review the chapters in this volume, and to the patient editors at Springer who have had to tolerate long delays in the delivery of this project.

Kim-chong Chong

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction



**Kim-chong Chong**

The different chapters in this *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi* cover different aspects of, and reflect different styles and methods in approaching, the *Zhuangzi*. Part I, Authorship and Commentary, involves the question of authorship and other textual issues. Part II, Concepts, contains accounts and analyses of some central concepts in the text. Part III, Language and Metaphor, is concerned with the significance of the language and metaphorical styles of the text. Part IV, Zhuangzi in the Context of Chinese Philosophy, situates Zhuangzi's philosophy in terms of its relation to and comparisons with other Chinese philosophies. Part V, Ethical, Social and Epistemic Issues brings up issues of values and knowledge arising from readings of the text. Finally, Part VI, The *Zhuangzi* and Western Philosophy, draws comparisons between the text and Zhuangzi on the one hand, with some Western philosophical texts and figures on the other.

Instead of summarizing all the individual chapters (some authors have contributed two each: Lo, Raphals, and Fried), I will do the following. I shall first describe what we know about the person Zhuangzi, his ideas and what he represents, both through the text of the *Zhuangzi* and through the records about him. In the course of this, certain questions and issues arise and we shall then see how the various parts and chapters address them. We shall also have occasion to make certain remarks about the scope of "philosophy" with reference to the *Zhuangzi*.

Who was Zhuangzi? Much of what we know comes from anecdotes in the text named after him. These tell of his poverty, scorn of officialdom and those who lower themselves for office and wealth, questioning the distinction between being

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© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

K.-c. Chong (ed.), *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi*, Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy 16,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92331-0\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92331-0_1)



“useful” and “useless,” and the value of being “useful” by conventional standards.<sup>1</sup> In one memorable anecdote, Zhuangzi is outrageously “sitting with his legs sprawled out, pounding on a tub and singing” at the funeral of his wife (Watson 1968: 194). Some people have (jokingly) remarked that perhaps he did not love his wife and was happy over her departure. However, this story is one representation, among others, of Zhuangzi’s criticism of Confucian ritual norms. In the story, Zhuangzi goes on to describe the process of life and death as being equivalent to the change of the four seasons. Thus, this story informs us too about Zhuangzi’s attitude of equanimity toward life and death and his philosophy of living in accordance with nature.

Apart from the stories, there is hardly any historical record of Zhuangzi the person. We have, for instance, the Confucian philosopher Xunzi’s remark that “Zhuangzi was blinded by heaven (i.e. nature) and did not know the human.”<sup>2</sup> There is also a biography of Zhuangzi by the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian (司馬遷 c.145–86 B.C.E), brief enough to be cited in full here.

Zhuangzi was a man of Meng (蒙). His personal name was Zhou. Zhou once served as an official at Qi Yuan (漆園) in Meng. He was a contemporary of King Hui of Liang and King Xuan of Qi. There was nothing on which his learning did not look into, but in essence they derived from the words of Laozi. Thus his writing, over 100,000 characters, consisted mostly of imputed words (*yuyan* 寓言). He wrote “Yu Fu” (The Old Fisherman), “Dao Zhi” (Robber Zhi), and “Qu Qie” (Rifling Trunks), in which he defamed the followers of Confucius and brought to light the teachings of Laozi. The likes of Wei Lei Xu (畏累虛), Geng Sang Zi (亢桑子) and others were all empty words without reality. Yet he was skilled in writing and turns of phrases, veiled references and analogies, and with these he excoriated the Confucians and Mohists. Even the learned men of that time were not free (from this). His words overflowed without restraint to suit himself. Thus important people from kings to dukes downwards were unable to make use of him in any capacity. King Wei of Chu heard that Zhuang Zhou was a worthy. He sent a messenger with lavish gifts to welcome him (to his court) with the promise of making him prime minister. Zhuang Zhou laughed and told the messenger from Chu: “A thousand *jin* is great profit and the minister-ship an esteemed position. But how is it that you have not seen the sacrificial cow in the suburban sacrifices? Fed for several years, it is then dressed in embroidered silk to enter the Great Temple. At that point in time, although it wishes to be a solitary piglet, how could it be realized? Go away quickly, do not pollute me. I would prefer to romp happily in a slimy ditch, not to be restricted by any ruler. Till the end of my life I shall not take office so that I can happily do as I wish. (Sima Qian 1982: 2143–2145)<sup>3</sup>

Despite its brevity this biography provides information about Zhuangzi’s affiliation with the teachings of Laozi, his criticism of the Confucians and Mohists (the major philosophical schools of his time), and the style of his writing. It also tells us that the rulers were “unable to make use of him in any capacity” because “His words

<sup>1</sup>These have been conveniently collected in “Stories about Chuang-tzu” in Graham (1981: 116–125). Note that “Chuang-tzu” is the Wade-Giles equivalent of “Zhuangzi.”

<sup>2</sup>My translation of the sentence from the *Xunzi*, 莊子蔽於天而不知人 (Li 1994: 478). John Knoblock translates this as “Zhuang Zhou was blinded by Nature and was insensible to men” (Knoblock 1994: 21.4). For an analysis of Xunzi’s remark, see Chong (2016) ch.1.

<sup>3</sup>My translation. 亢桑子 is synonymous with 庚桑楚 in the *Zhuangzi*. He is said to have been a disciple of Laozi. For details about places and names, see Nienhauser Jr. (1994: 23–24).

overflowed without restraint to suit himself.” However, the anecdote at the end suggests that this had more to do with Zhuangzi’s rejecting the rulers rather than their rejecting him. Apparently because of his fame as a “worthy,” King Wei of the state of Chu extended an invitation to take office which Zhuangzi scornfully rejects. A similar story can be found in Chapter 17 of the text, “Autumn Floods” (Watson 1968: 187–88). This story is significant in representing Zhuangzi’s anti-authoritarian streak and the value that he places on individual freedom. While many other intellectuals of his time were concerned with giving advice on governance to the rulers, Zhuangzi kept them at a distance.

Sima Qian also mentions three writings which can be found in the extant *Zhuangzi*.<sup>4</sup> These are “The Old Fisherman” (Chapter 31), “Robber Zhi” (Chapter 29), and “Rifling Trunks” (Chapter 10). The first of these criticizes the extent toward which the performance of ritual propriety had become mechanical and devoid of spontaneous feeling; the second attacks Confucius as being self-deceptive and hypocritical; and the third expresses moral skepticism.

None of these, however, belong to the first seven “Inner” chapters of the extant text, widely believed to be the work of Zhuangzi himself. Esther Klein’s earlier “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’ in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*” has been very influential in questioning the common assumption that the Inner Chapters were written by Zhuangzi (Klein 2011). The chapters in Part I, Text and Authorship, take up this and related issues. In “Early Chinese Culture and the *Zhuangzi* Anthology: An Alternative Model for Authorship,” Esther Klein develops her views further by, among other things, questioning the provenance of anecdotes about Zhuangzi or Zhuang Zhou, and giving an account of the processes of textual formation and concluding that the *Zhuangzi* is “an anthology of somewhat uncertain authorship.”

In “The Authorship of the *Zhuangzi*,” Yuet Keung Lo reexamines a variety of historical, textual, philosophical and archaeological evidence to give a more nuanced answer as to whether the historical Zhuang Zhou authored the Inner Chapters. Lo agrees that the very idea of “authorship” makes it practically impossible to ascertain that Zhuang Zhou was the author of the *Zhuangzi*. Nevertheless, he argues that this traditional belief has yet to be *disproved*. Zhuang Zhou was a real historical person and hence there is a real possibility that he wrote some parts of the *Zhuangzi* as we know it. Nor can we rule out the possibility that at least *some* of the Inner Chapters as we know them did exist in the Warring States period. However, their existence does not necessarily mean that they originally belonged to what we identify as “Inner Chapters” since Guo Xiang had redacted the *Zhuangzi*. While acknowledging the strength of some of Klein’s arguments in her earlier paper, Lo at the same time gives others the scholarly attention that they deserve. He is probably the first (so far as I am aware) to engage this earlier paper properly and in substantive detail.

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<sup>4</sup>As both Klein and Lo note in their papers in the present volume, Sima Qian did not refer (or at least not directly) to a text or a corpus named the “*Zhuangzi*.” Similarly, the three titles that he mentions are not said to be “chapters” belonging to such a text.

Scholars on the *Zhuangzi* will, I am sure, appreciate this exchange of ideas between Klein and Lo.

In “The *Lüshi chunqiu* as Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*,”<sup>5</sup> Scott Cook shows how the former established a model for a commentarial tradition on the latter with its reading of certain key passages. Several chapters in the later sections will refer to traditional commentators and tell us more about their views on the *Zhuangzi* (see for example, the chapters of Chai, Lin, and Tan) in their discussions of certain concepts and ideas.

The mention of King Hui of Liang (370–319 BCE) and King Xuan of Qi (319–301 BCE) in Sima Qian’s biography indicates that Zhuangzi was a contemporary of Mencius (孟子 Mengzi) who is recorded in the *Mencius* as having conversations with both kings. This was the height of the chaotic Warring States period when various states fought for power and control over vast territories, culminating in the final victory of the state of Qin and resulting in the unification of the Chinese empire in 221 BCE. Some studies suggest that Zhuangzi belonged to a ruling clan in the state of Song that was deposed by another. Eventually, Song was conquered by other states and divided up among them. Zhuangzi was probably greatly affected by these events and instead of writing tracts or treatises on governance, devoted himself to more spiritual matters (Wang 2012: 169–178). If true, this account might partly explain the element of self-preservation in his philosophy.

There is no record of any philosophical rivalry between Mencius and Zhuangzi in the texts named after them.<sup>6</sup> However, we find the following aims, thoughts and beliefs in the *Zhuangzi* to which Mencius was directly or indirectly opposed. These are the aims of self-preservation and nourishment of one’s own life; the claim that morality is an artificial construct; the assertions of skepticism (both moral and epistemic); the thought of *tian* (heaven) as referring to nature or the natural and as non-normative; the assumption of and belief in the possibility of an ideal primitively simple life; and the belief that there is no essentially moral human nature apart from basic desires, needs and capacities. In the *Zhuangzi*, we also find something that is not in the *Mencius*: metaphysical speculation about the non-distinctness and oneness of all things, and about *dao* as the origination of things—as opposed to the *dao* or way of bringing about proper moral governance (Chong [Forthcoming](#)).

Sima Qian says that Zhuangzi “brought to light the teachings of Laozi.” In contemporary terms, this would make him a “Daoist” (*daojia* 道家) and in fact Zhuangzi is regarded as the second most representative figure of Daoism after Laozi. However, we should note that this classification was made later in the Han dynasty and there was no such designated school during Zhuangzi’s time. Certainly, there was no reference to any Daoist school in the *Mencius*, and as we have mentioned, Mencius and Zhuangzi were contemporaries. The philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, in fact, has an

<sup>5</sup>The *Lüshi chunqiu* is translated by Knoblock and Riegel (2000) as *The Annals of Lü Buwei*.

<sup>6</sup>Some contemporary authors think that in the *Zhuangzi*, there is criticism of Mencius’s view of human nature. Franklin Perkins, for example, says that “The clearest attack on on a normative conception of human nature comes through the appearance of various people with abnormal bodies...” (Perkins 2014: 158).

unique integrity of its own. It is therefore important to understand it in terms of some concepts that occur in the text. A careful study will reveal intricate relationships between them and both the unique and unified nature of Zhuangzi's philosophy as a whole. It may also help us to understand what was behind Xunzi's astute remark that "Zhuangzi was blinded by heaven (i.e. nature) and did not know the human." Indeed, the term *tian* or "heaven" may be said to be the overarching concept of Zhuangzi's philosophy which encompasses all the others mentioned.

Thus, in Part II, Concepts, Franklin Perkins examines the divisional relation between "Heaven" (*tian* 天) and the "Human" (*ren* 人). Masayuki Sato discusses the concepts of "Transformation" and the philosophy of "Transformation of Things" (*hua* 化 and *wu hua* 物化), showing how this philosophy links together and runs through several chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. Steve Coutinho discusses the "Ontology of the Vast and the Minute" (*da* 大 and *xiao* 小); Keqian Xu examines the nature of the "True Person" (*zhen ren* 真人) and its relation to "True Knowledge" (*zhen zhi* 真知); David Chai discusses the idea of having "no-emotion" (*wu qing* 無情); and Lisa Raphals analyzes the philosophical import and scope of *ming* (命) in Zhuangzi's philosophy, a term which has commonly been translated as "fate" or "destiny."

Sima Qian says that "(Zhuangzi) was skilled in writing and turns of phrases, veiled references and analogies...." He mentions the use of imputed words or metaphorical words (*yuyan* 寓言). In the *Zhuangzi*, beside *yuyan*, two other tropes are mentioned. These are *zhongyan* (重言) or the words of those whom people respect, and *zhiyan* (卮言) or "goblet words." This is a reference to a wine goblet which, when full, would tip and pour out its contents. Similarly, Zhuangzi's goblet words are such as to empty themselves when poured forth (see the chapters of Fried and Lin in Part III. Also, Lin 1989, 1994. Shang, in Part VI, provides another interpretation in his comparison of Zhuangzi with Nietzsche.). An investigation of the significance of these metaphors will necessitate analysis of different facets of his style of writing and use of language, which is so uniquely different from the more prosaic style of other texts in the period of the Warring States.

This is the subject of Part III, Language and Metaphor. Zhuangzi thinks that language is inadequate in some way or ways to communicate ideas. What exactly is the problem and is there a paradox here? Why does the *Zhuangzi* use language in such paradoxical ways? Roy Porat, "Language in the *Zhuangzi*," provides a synopsis of these issues. Daniel Fried's "Three Words" discusses the three tropes mentioned earlier. In "Humor and its Philosophical Significance in the *Zhuangzi*," Hans-Georg Moeller argues that Zhuangzi's humor serves a philosophical purpose or purposes in different ways. Philosophical argument has conventionally been conceived in terms of propositional syllogisms and theories (metaphysical, epistemic, and so on). Instead, Moeller shows how the stories in the *Zhuangzi* serve to deconstruct certain entrenched ideas and ways of looking at things. In "Those Who Fly Without Wings," Shuen-Fu Lin shows how, in the Inner Chapters, Zhuangzi skillfully uses variation on the leitmotif of flying to depict the supreme ideal figure of the Sage, Perfect Person, or Daimonic Person and who embodies absolute spiritual freedom. At the same time, Lin reveals an intricate coherence and unity to the Inner Chapters in terms of this technique of variation. Lin's chapter provides many

insightful readings of passages in the *Zhuangzi*, including the views of various traditional and contemporary commentators.

Together, the chapters in this section provide an important insight, namely, that a conception of philosophy which sharply separates it from literature is untenable. This point has been made by others, elsewhere. Romain Graziani, for instance, has stated that in the *Zhuangzi*, “the tale, the parable or the fable is never the lesser relative of philosophy...Zhuangzi sets himself and his thought in the constantly changing depiction of the particular, by alternating voices, locations, characters, and tones. His style of composition is clearly in tune with his purely philosophical intentions” (Graziani 2021: 6). And Julianne Chung has argued that Zhuangzi is a “fictionalist” whose language does not aim at propositional truth but instead allows the reader to recognize and to engage with more open-ended perspectives (Chung 2018, see also Chong 2006). In this regard, aesthetic features of works of art, including literature, might be related to, or can be said to have, cognitive or epistemic value (Chung 2018). It should be noted that “philosophy” in a more traditional Chinese sense is inseparable from literature and would also be inclusive of other cultural elements such as practices of “self-cultivation.” We shall say a bit more about this later.

Despite questions about who wrote the *Zhuangzi*, the person, character, and free spirit of Zhuangzi have long become an integral part of, and entrenched in, Chinese philosophy and culture. The chapters in Part IV, *Zhuangzi in the Context of Chinese Philosophy*, compares Zhuangzi and his philosophy with other Chinese philosophers and philosophies across some periods of Chinese history. These comparisons enable us to highlight and to better understand some aspects of Zhuangzi’s philosophy.

Thus, in “Zhuangzi and the Laozi: An Intertextual Approach,” Daniel Fried discusses the relation between Zhuangzi and Laozi from an examination of the texts named after them, and other texts as well. Sai-Hang Kwok analyzes a somewhat neglected topic, namely, the interaction between Zhuangzi and the Logicians, showing us how the former responded to the latter; and Angel Ting looks at the philosophical differences between Zhuangzi and Xunzi. The Confucian Xunzi is widely believed to have been influenced by Zhuangzi, even though critical of him. An examination of their different views helps to illuminate Zhuangzi’s philosophy. Yuet Keung Lo discusses “Wei-Jin *Xuanxue*.” The Wei-Jin (third to sixth century A.D.) was a period of disunity during which certain figures provided new readings of texts such as the *Analecets*, *Laozi*, *Yijing*, and the *Zhuangzi*. Lo pays particular attention to the work of Guo Xiang who is widely known for his redaction of the *Zhuangzi* in 33 chapters and which serves as the extant text which we all rely on today.

It is common for readers of the *Zhuangzi* to remark that it reminds them of Buddhist philosophy, given passages in the text about the attitude of equanimity toward life and death. It is also commonly believed that it paved the way for the reception of Buddhism in China. In “The *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism,” Lynne Hong describes the intellectual interaction between the two philosophies in different periods of Chinese history, and investigates the differences between them via two shared topics: the pursuit of liberation and the methodology of dual negation. With

reference to the early Buddhist canon *Nikāya* in Pāli, and *Āgamas* in Chinese, she compares the Buddhist idea of liberation with that of the *Zhuangzi*. And she draws upon the philosophy of Nāgārjuna in discussing how some later Daoists came to base their methodology of dual negation on both the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism.

Mingran Tan's chapter is "Wang Fuzhi's Evaluation of the *Zhuangzi*." Wang Fuzhi was a Neo-Confucian in the early part of the Qing dynasty. Although critical of Zhuangzi, Wang reinterpreted both Zhuangzi's philosophy and Confucianism, eventually reconciling the two. Wang belongs to a school of thought that ultimately regards Zhuangzi as admiring Confucius and articulating his views, and may perhaps even be said to be a part of the Confucian school.<sup>7</sup>

Earlier, we mentioned that "philosophy" in a traditional Chinese sense would include practices of "self-cultivation." For the Confucians, this largely refers to moral self-cultivation. For Daoists, however, this refers to a practice or practices of nourishment of the body and even certain religious practices. In this regard, Pierre Hadot's remarks about ancient philosophy in the West would apply equally to ancient Chinese philosophy: "Philosophical discourse...originates in a choice of life and an existential option—not vice versa...The philosophical school thus corresponds, above all, to the choice of a certain way of life and existential option which demands...ultimately a certain desire to be and to live in a certain way. This existential option, in turn, implies a certain vision of the world, and the task of philosophical discourse will therefore be to reveal and rationally justify this existential option, as well as this representation of the world" (Hadot 2004: 3). In "Inner Alchemy and Mystical Experience in the *Zhuangzi*," Kei Yeung Luk discusses passages in the *Zhuangzi* from which we may try and understand the concepts related to the practice of self-cultivation. And in "Zhuangzi and Religious Daoism," Livia Kohn describes how Zhuangzi is situated, and how he became venerated, within the tradition and practice of religious Daoism.

Scholars of a more purely sinological bent sometimes complain that present-day philosophers treat Zhuangzi as if both the person and the text can be understood in contemporary philosophical terms. Others, too, might even say that doing this subordinates Zhuangzi to Western philosophy and philosophers. These are legitimate concerns. But as Tao Jiang has aptly put it elsewhere, philosophers place "much more emphasis on studying the conceptual resources contained in the inherited texts available to Chinese intellectuals over the ages and on reconstructing those ideas as a potential conceptual resource in dealing with philosophical issues of contemporary significance, often in dialogue with Western philosophy" (Jiang 2016: 52). Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* is a highly stimulating and imaginative text prompting philosophical reflection. The nature of the *Zhuangzi* is such that more than any other ancient Chinese text, it can be said to invite, and indeed welcome, a diversity of methods and philosophical approaches towards its study. Used with some care, the conceptual resources and instruments of philosophical investigation, argument, and analysis can enrich readings of the text and bring out issues in ways that a purely

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<sup>7</sup>For a more recent instance of this, see Scott Cook (1997).



sinological or traditional approach may be unable to. These include eliciting from the *Zhuangzi* ethical, social, and epistemic insights.

Thus in Part V, Ethical, Social and Epistemic Issues, Chris Fraser gives an account of what he calls “Interpersonal Ethics” in the *Zhuangzi* given its rejection of Confucian moral norms; Wai Wai Chiu discusses the notion of “Filial Piety” in the *Zhuangzi*, in a way that is very different from some others who have regarded it as endorsing the Confucian idea of filial piety; and Tao Jiang discusses “Personal Freedom and the Good Life in the *Zhuangzi*,” giving an account of the “Zhuangist” (other authors alternatively use “Zhuangzian” or “Zhuangian”) conception of freedom and what constitutes a “good life.” In “The Social and Political Implications of Zhuangzi’s Philosophy,” Kim-chong Chong shows how, instead of being merely a spiritually comforting idea in the face of death or a means of attaining spiritual freedom, the philosophy of “transformation of things” and its corresponding idea of the “oneness of things” can ground the values of freedom, pluralism, and a sense of common humanity with others.

Three chapters in this section deal with different aspects of knowledge. The issue of whether and how Zhuangzi is a skeptic has been much discussed in the literature. David Wong describes what he calls “Constructive Skepticism” in the *Zhuangzi*. This also involves a reading of how the notion of perspectives is to be understood. Next, the question of how to understand the knowledge and agency of certain “skill masters” has also been a subject of much discussion (see for example, Lai and Chiu 2019). This is taken further by Karyn Lai, in “Performance and Agency in the *Zhuangzi*.” She presents an account of agency embedded in some of the stories of the mastery of certain skills in terms of action, habit, attentiveness, responsiveness and cultivation. The performances of the masters, though seemingly automatic, are not just merely habitual, however. There is the need to respond attentively to situational contingencies, and hence also the risk of failure. But at the same time, this allows us to understand the possibilities of human achievement. And in the last chapter of this section, Lisa Raphals provides an account of “Neuroscientific and Cognitive Perspectives on the *Zhuangzi*” where she discusses insights gained from it about the nature of the self, the intimate connection between the body and cognitive processes, and how techniques of meditation allow for “forgetting,” “emptying the mind,” and dissociating the mind from the body.

Increasingly, both Zhuangzi and the text have become subjects of comparisons with Western philosophy and philosophers. The subjects of comparison in Part VI, The *Zhuangzi* and Western Philosophy, though evidently not exhaustive, nevertheless show what is possible. Such comparisons, if done well, may both help to illuminate some ideas of the *Zhuangzi* and provide philosophical insights generally. In the first chapter of this section, Rohan Sikri discusses “The Art of Nourishing Life” in relation to the “Therapeutic Dialectics” of the Platonic dialogues. Next, Sonya Özbey discusses “The Cementing and Loosening of Human Bonds” in her comparison of Spinoza and the *Zhuangzi*. Geling Shang provides a study of “Zhuangzi and Nietzsche.” Both philosophers have often been briefly compared. Here, Shang provides a more thorough and systematic comparison. Eric Nelson discusses “Heidegger and the German Reception of the *Zhuangzi*.” And finally, in “Zhuangzi’s Notion of

the True Master and Wittgenstein's Grammatical Investigation," Leo Cheung analyzes the concept of "I" in the *Zhuangzi*, and shows how it can be further elucidated through certain "grammatical" remarks of Ludwig Wittgenstein's.

It is of course impossible to provide a "comprehensive" account of any philosophical text, let alone one as rich as the *Zhuangzi*. The present volume also does not cover venerable traditions of scholarship on it in other European languages, such as French and German, for instance (although Eric Nelson does discuss the German reception of the *Zhuangzi*), not to mention Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean. But the chapters in this volume should serve as a "companion" and guide by informing the student and relatively uninformed reader about various aspects of the *Zhuangzi* as we have described above, including the different styles and methods of approaching it. Together, they offer an appreciation of, and insights into, a complex and fascinating text with many different layers of meaning.

Accommodating the different methodologies and styles has meant giving some leeway to the presentation of the chapters. For instance, some authors have required more space than others. This is generally the case with the more sinologically grounded chapters. Also, authors cite or make use of different editions of the *Zhuangzi*, together with different translations of passages and chapter titles. No attempt has been made to standardize them and the reader should be aware that part of the complexity in attempting to understand the *Zhuangzi* lies in its different translations and readings. This includes the readings of the traditional Chinese commentators (as may be gathered from some of the chapters in this volume) and translations in contemporary Chinese. There are some overlaps and different treatment of certain terms and issues among the different chapters (such as on authorship, transformation, goblet words, skepticism, Zhuangzi's metaphysical position, the idea of the self, the good life, and so on). The more specialized readers should find the contents of (at least some of) the chapters to be original and engaging. As one reviewer aptly said, although he/she does not agree fully with some of them, "this is due to the complexity of Zhuangzi's thought itself, and different views can be inspired by each other."

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**Part I**  
**Authorship and Commentary**

# Chapter 2

## Early Chinese Textual Culture and the *Zhuangzi* Anthology: An Alternative Model for Authorship



Esther Sunkyung Klein

### 1 Introduction

A widely accepted view about the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 is that its core was written by a Warring States (476–221 BCE) figure named ZHUANG Zhou 莊周.<sup>1</sup> The remainder of the work, according to this view, is a mixture of material that might have come from ZHUANG Zhou, or from his followers, or from others whose ideas sometimes differ considerably from those typically ascribed to ZHUANG Zhou. Such a view is problematic in several ways. First, it relies on an anachronistic picture of textual production that goes against much of what we now know about Warring States textual culture. Second, it downplays suggestive evidence from the Han 漢 (205 BCE–220 CE) and Six dynasties (220–589 CE) periods that could easily push us toward quite a different picture of *Zhuangzi* text formation. Third and most consequential, the conventional view leads to a way of approaching the *Zhuangzi* that over-emphasizes the Inner Chapters at the expense of the other parts of the text. For all of these reasons, it is time to seriously entertain alternative proposals about the *Zhuangzi*'s authorship and process of text formation.

The *Zhuangzi* we have today derives from the edition (with accompanying commentary) created by GUO Xiang 郭象 (d.312). This edition has thirty-three chapters, classified into three divisions: seven Inner Chapters (*neipian* 內篇), fifteen Outer Chapters (*waipian* 外篇), and eleven Miscellaneous Chapters (*zapiian* 雜篇). Since almost no one today believes that ZHUANG Zhou wrote the entire work, the issue of

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of ZHUANG Zhou's dates, see below.

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the *Zhuangzi*'s authorship is closely bound up with the controversy over what these divisions can be taken to reflect. LIU Xiaogan 劉笑敢 has argued extensively for a fairly conservative position: first, that the divisions do reflect differences in authorship, and second, that the seven Inner Chapters were authored by ZHUANG Zhou himself, while chapters in the other divisions are the work of ZHUANG Zhou's followers or disciples (LIU 1994: 1).<sup>2</sup> He furthermore holds the view that the entire text took something like its present form as early as 240 BCE (LIU 1994: 162). Toward the other end of the spectrum, WANG Shumin 王叔岷 argued that "there truly are authenticity issues surrounding the thirty-three chapter *Zhuangzi*, but we cannot rely on the Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapter [divisions] to make judgements about them" 莊子三十三篇誠有真偽問題,然不可憑內、外、雜篇為斷 (WANG 1988: 1436).<sup>3</sup> Pointing to evidence of instability in the contents of the three divisions, he argued that "the inner, outer, and miscellaneous chapter divisions in the Guo edition were mostly likely fixed in accordance with [his] private ideas" 郭本內、外、雜篇之區畫,蓋由私意所定 (WANG 1988: 1434–35).<sup>4</sup>

The present essay puts forth a related but slightly different proposal, inspired first and foremost by the revised picture of Warring States textual culture that has emerged with the archaeological discoveries of the past century.<sup>5</sup> Simply put, the relationship between the historical ZHUANG Zhou and the text that bears his name is unknowable on any present evidence or on any evidence that is likely to surface. Furthermore, the Warring States ancestors of our present *Zhuangzi* text are better thought of as "proto-*Zhuangzi* materials," although even this agnostic categorization contains unfortunate teleological assumptions. The creation of the *Zhuangzi* in its present form was a multi-stage process. Research on this process is necessarily speculative, but evidence points to the idea that, after a period of some instability,

<sup>2</sup>Liu traces the origin of this view to WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) but he elaborates on it considerably.

<sup>3</sup>This view is also endorsed by Christopher Rand, who concludes that "upon close inspection, the *nei/wai/za* divisions have come to appear increasingly arbitrary, and minimally reflective of any one date of composition or [of] overall textual integrity" (Rand 1983: 17). In his excellent but often overlooked study of the *Zhuangzi*, Rand cautiously accepts that "a significant percentage, though not all, of the 'inner chapters' were probably drafted by the master himself or his immediate disciples." LIU Xiaogan attributes a similar view to FENG Youlan, with the difference that Feng's view is more specific, favoring just the first two chapters with the rest to be determined on a case-by-case basis (LIU 1994: 2; FENG 2000: 346).

<sup>4</sup>Wang seems still to advocate a differential epistemic attitude toward Inner and non-Inner Chapters. Under the heading "The attitude one should take toward researching the Guo [Xiang] edition of the *Zhuangzi*" 研究郭本莊子應有之態度, he writes, "By and large the Inner Chapters are relatively reliable, but are not necessarily entirely reliable. The Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters are relatively dubious, but are not necessarily entirely dubious" 大抵內篇較可信,而未必盡可信。外篇較可疑,而未必盡可疑 (WANG 1988: 1438). Although this attitude is more cautious than assuming the divisions to be reliable evidence of authorship, it still gives Inner Chapters the benefit of the doubt by default, while advocating a default attitude of suspicion toward non-Inner Chapters.

<sup>5</sup>Many of these insights were also foreshadowed by scholars working within the transmitted textual tradition, such as ZHANG Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) and YU Jiaxi. An excellent discussion, citing earlier authors, can be found in Richter 2013: 65–70.

there were likely two key inflection points in the Han (at the court of Huainan 淮南 and the editorial operations of Liu Xiang 劉向 [77–6 BCE]). Another major turning point in the development of the text was the work of Guo Xiang, whose edition screens off (though incompletely) much of the *Zhuangzi*'s earlier textual history.<sup>6</sup> To supersede less felicitous descriptions,<sup>7</sup> one might describe this as “the Anthology hypothesis.”<sup>8</sup>

The Anthology hypothesis has much in its favor. The biggest strike against it may well be its upshot. It is entirely possible to engage in literary or philosophical study of an anthology, though certain problems become thornier.<sup>9</sup> The deeper problem is that our attachment to Zhuangzi-the-author is not merely academic, and it is more powerful and specific than a mere background attachment to the idea of authorship generally (see Defoort 2016). Emotional defenses of Zhuangzi-as-author are ubiquitous in private contexts,<sup>10</sup> but a beautifully revealing published example appears in Kjellberg and Ivanhoe's introduction to their 1996 edited volume, *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. They write: “Zhuangzi confronts his readers with some of life's most painful and difficult problems... but he does so with a confidence and good humour that holds the promise of some solution.” And further on, “the simple fact [that] he wrote a book indicates that he has some ideas on how people ought to live” (Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996: xiii-xiv). Those for whom the *Zhuangzi* is a beloved text (the present author included) want for there to have been a Zhuangzi, someone who was able to face life's worst challenges with the “confidence and good humour” displayed by Zhuangzi-the-character. We want that person to have written a book, and we want that book to be the extant *Zhuangzi*. If any link in this chain should be broken, we may feel that we have lost something precious.

Nonetheless, there is also something ironic about clinging to this particular figure in such a way. Zhuangzi-the-character is closely associated with an attitude of equanimity in the face of transformation. The philosopher who was agnostic about the metaphysical status of his oneiric transformation into a butterfly (Wang 1988: 95) would not be one to stand on the niceties of textual attribution. Zhuangzi-the-author, through a transformation in textual culture, took form and came to life; if through another shift in season he were to pass from life and come to be “laid out solemnly in an enormous room” 儼然寢於巨室, would it be right to trail after him crying *ao'ao* (Wang 1988: 645)? To read the *Zhuangzi* as an anthology of uncertain authorship is a transformation more than a loss. It is not intended to denigrate the

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of the Guo Xiang edition, see Rand 1983: 10–15; Bumbacher 2016: 655–57.

<sup>7</sup>For example, the “Any Time Collection theory” or “No Specific Author Theory” described by Liu 2014: 131, 142.

<sup>8</sup>The idea of describing the *Zhuangzi* as an anthology has earlier antecedents, but the present use of the term derives from Fraser (1997, 2006).

<sup>9</sup>Jiang Tao (2016) discusses these using the *Zhuangzi* as a case study but pointing to a more general difficulty.

<sup>10</sup>Klein 2010, for example, has generated many an aggrieved personal communication, though it is only occasionally criticized in print.

Inner Chapters or the figure of ZHUANG Zhou. Instead, it is meant as a call to reassess the status and importance of the non-Inner Chapters, as well as a call to see intra-*Zhuangzi* connections through a lens other than “authorial coherence” or “a single individual’s system of thought.”

There are many strands of evidence for the *Zhuangzi* Anthology hypothesis, and many ways to answer its critics. The present investigation is limited to a discussion of textual culture in the Warring States, Qin 秦 (221–206 BCE), and Han. In this way it advances a positive view: that the Anthology hypothesis makes sense in light of what we now know about pre-Han textual culture. The conventional picture of *Zhuangzi* authorship, on the other hand, depends on assumptions that were formed on the basis of later periods’ textual cultures and projected back onto the Warring States.

## 2 Warring States Textual Culture and the *Zhuangzi* Materials

One might begin with the question, “Did ZHUANG Zhou write at least part of the *Zhuangzi*?” An affirmative answer to this question has seemed obvious at least since the Western Han. What if, however, one attempts to sidestep Han dynasty beliefs and pre-occupations, which have shaped our picture of early China for so long? Current evidence about Warring States textual culture yields a different picture than the one passed down by tradition. Even if one does eventually opt for an affirmative answer regarding ZHUANG Zhou’s authorship of the *Zhuangzi*, the evidential grounds for such a choice are not obviously sound. This only becomes clear if one sets aside questions like “Who authored the Warring States portions of the *Zhuangzi*?”—since this presupposes the existence of a *Zhuangzi* at that time—and instead frames the question as “What is the most likely process by which Warring States texts in general (and this text in particular) came into being?”

Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (1884–1955) investigated this question in detail. The materials he employed were mainly transmitted texts, but recent archaeological finds have tended to confirm his work (see Li L. 2001: 25–34; Gu 2018: 408–32; Goldin 2020: 5). He made an ingenious argument to show that, even in the Qin and early Han dynasties, texts did not—as part of the structure of the written document—record the names of their authors. This appears to have been the case even when the authorship of those texts was clearly known: he cites accounts from the Western Han dynasty history *Shiji* 史記 (*Historian’s Records*) in which writings by HAN Fei 韓非 (280–233 BCE) and SIMA Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca.179–117 BCE) are being read, and yet their authorship is revealed only through the supplemental information of bystanders personally acquainted with the authors in question (Yu Jiaxi 1985: 16–17; see *Shiji* 1959: 63.2155, 117.3002).<sup>11</sup> Although the material Yu had to work

<sup>11</sup> On concerns about the historicity of such reading scenes, see Kern 2003: 308. Even if they are fictionalized, however, the fact that SIMA Qian (or whoever created them) wrote them that way may still serve as evidence for the point in question.

with was limited and could potentially be subject to confounds (i.e., alternative explanations for the phenomena he observed), excavated texts also confirm that writing an author's name on a text was not a usual part of Warring States practice.

A slightly more controversial but still well-supported conclusion of Yu Jiaxi's study is that, although it was common for individual essays or chapters (*pian* 篇) to bear titles, overall book titles are unattested prior to the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Annals of Mister Lü*) and still not common until the Han dynasty (Yu Jiaxi 1985: 30).<sup>12</sup> This was particularly true for “masters” (philosophical) writings.<sup>13</sup> In *Shiji* accounts, SIMA Qian 司馬遷 (b.145 BCE) does not refer to a *Han Feizi*, but rather to “‘Solitary Resentment’, ‘The Five Vermin’, ‘Inner and Outer Collections’, ‘Forest of Persuasions’, and ‘The Difficulties of Persuasion’ in more than one hundred thousand words” 孤憤、五蠹、內外儲、說林、說難十餘萬言 (*Shiji* 1959: 63.2147). In describing the poems associated with QU Yuan 屈原 (c.340–278 BCE), SIMA Qian refers only to “Encountering Sorrow” 離騷, “Heavenly Questions” 天問, “Summoning the Soul” 招魂, “A Lament for Ying” 哀郢, and “Embracing the Sands” 懷沙 (*Shiji* 1959: 84.2503, 84.2486)—not the *Chu ci* 楚辭, as the collection is known today.<sup>14</sup> The situation is similar with the text SIMA Qian attributes to ZHUANG Zhou. He gives an overall word count and mentions some chapters by name: “The Old Fisherman” 漁父, “Robber Zhi” 盜跖, “Rifling Trunks” 胠篋, “Weilei xu” 畏累虛, and “Master Gengsang” 亢桑子 (*Shiji* 1959: 63.2143).<sup>15</sup>

Separately named essays (or anecdote assemblages) might have been associated together in more or less stable collections for which chapter or character counts are mentioned, but these collections did not tend to be referred to by an overall name.

<sup>12</sup>Li Ling has questioned this but without solid evidence. He suggests that archaeological finds could possibly display systematic differences in this regard, but his main argument that “major” texts must have had titles is only that LIU Xiang would have needed a way to categorise and differentiate texts (Li L. 2001: 27). An alternative hypothesis is that LIU Xiang's editing process, and the coalescence of his disparate sources into the texts we know today, was a great deal more arbitrary than we are accustomed to believing.

<sup>13</sup>Yu proposes that this likely began to change with the *Lüshi chunqiu* (1985: 30). That text was clearly exceptional in that it was self-consciously promoted as a text, and its completeness was an explicitly advertised feature (see *Shiji* 1959: 85.2510). The *Shiji* narrative appears somewhat ambiguous about the origin of the title: “It is known as (or nicknamed?) *Lüshi chunqiu*” 號曰呂氏春秋, and Yu goes out of his way to state that the title should be read as coming from LÜ Buwei himself rather than from other people of the time. Even if Yu is correct, this would only apply to SIMA Qian's beliefs about the title's origin rather than the actual circumstances in which it arose. Note that SIMA Qian sometimes refers to it as “Lü's readings” 呂覽 (which is actually just one of its three divisions; see *Shiji* 1959: 130.3300), so the title may not have been fully stable even in the Western Han.

<sup>14</sup>The *Shiji* does employ the phrase *chuci* 楚辭 in one anecdote (*Shiji* 1959: 122.3143), narrating events near the end of the period covered by the text. In this case, though, it is likely that *chuci* refers to songs of the Chu state as a generic category rather than the collection as we know it (which is generally understood to have been put together by WANG Yi 王逸 [ca.89–158]).

<sup>15</sup>Notably, four of these are now non-Inner Chapters in the received *Zhuangzi* (chapters 31, 29, 10, and 23). It would seem that “Weilei xu” was once a chapter in the *Zhuangzi* but was either eliminated or amalgamated into one of the other chapters at some point in the process of transmission.

Nor does having been collected together imply common authorship. An interesting excavated example of this is the Guodian 郭店 “Laozi C” 老子丙 manuscript and the “Great One Generates Water” 太一生水, which, as Scott Cook describes, were both “written on strips of the exact same dimension and calligraphic style, strongly [implying] that they were bound together as parts of the same scroll” (Cook 2012: 198). Everything Warring States archaeology has taught us about textual culture at the time suggests that the tendency to anthologize far outstripped the tendency to attribute. It was retrospective attributions, very likely from the Han, that sometimes placed the collected texts under the umbrella of a master’s teachings. As Martin Kern puts it, “most—if not indeed all— of our received ‘Masters’ texts are composite works that stage their respective ‘Masters’ rather than being authored by them” (Kern 2015: 337).<sup>16</sup>

At this point, one might begin to wonder about the attribution of *any* Warring States text. Such doubts are justified. It seems plausible and even likely that the Warring States as we know it was a Han production, even if most of the constituent materials were genuine Warring States writings. That is to say, the *personalities* that have been built up from the attribution and arrangement of texts might never have belonged to anyone who actually lived—they might instead be retrospective Han (and later) constructions.<sup>17</sup> A.C. Graham’s brief description of Warring States textual formation, with particular reference to the *Zhuangzi*, seems to be a well-founded picture:

Ancient Chinese thinkers did not write books; they jotted down sayings, verses, stories, thoughts and by the third century BCE essays, on bamboo strips which were tied together in sheets and rolled up in scrolls.... Collections of scrolls ascribed on good or bad authority to a single author or school grew up gradually and did not assume a standard form until Liu Xiang. (Graham 1981: 27)

Can Graham’s own view, “that the inner chapters can be confidently ascribed to Chuang-tzu himself” (Graham 1990: 283), survive taking the above description seriously, especially in combination with Yu Jiaxi’s observations? Or put another way, what might count as a “good” authority for ascription?

## 2.1 *The Role of Disciples in Textual Transmission*

For thinkers such as Confucius or Mencius, named disciples are explicitly portrayed as forming the link between “the master” and the text that came to be associated with him. The emphasis placed on the role of disciples and followers—sometimes through multiple generations—is another clear sign that Yu Jiaxi’s conclusions are sound: given the conventions of the time, textual markers alone would not have been

<sup>16</sup> For a similar point see Vankeerberghen 2010: 466–67; Lewis 1999: 54.

<sup>17</sup> Fischer’s description of the “polymorphous text paradigm” contains many helpful insights into the “problematic authorship” of nearly all Warring States texts (2008–2009: 1–3).



sufficient grounds for ascription. Or from another perspective, what need for such textual markers when a master's immortality lay in the hands of his students? Would not a living, breathing, and eloquent disciple be a far more powerful testament to the master's wisdom than a few brushmarks whose authenticity would be impossible to verify? Or a bundling of scrolls that could easily be altered? Texts in the Kongzi tradition<sup>18</sup> often explicitly portray specific master-disciple relationships and teaching traditions, presumably because a particular program of education is such a fundamental aspect of their thought. The *Mozi* 墨子 too has named disciples and realistic pedagogical content; later parts of the work "reflect a flourishing Mohist organization that trains students, recommends them for government posts, and dispatches them on military assignments" (Fraser 2016: 13).

So natural is it to assume that Warring States texts were transmitted by disciples, that the existence of Zhuangzian disciple-transmitters is almost taken for granted. LIU Xiaogan even suggests that ZHUANG Zhou's students appended anecdotes about their master to the ends of the inner chapters, and adds that such anecdotes appear throughout the rest of the text as well, not always at the ends of chapters (LIU 1994: 18–20).<sup>19</sup> A.C. Graham also proposes a "School of Zhuangzi."<sup>20</sup> But did ZHUANG Zhou really have disciples? And if so, would they have been the type to faithfully transmit and accurately ascribe whatever jottings the master might have left?

On one level, the answer to the first question is obvious. After all, the *Zhuangzi* does occasionally mention interactions between Master ZHUANG and disciples: in four anecdotes, to be exact. But should these be read literally, as reflecting the historical reality of ZHUANG Zhou's intellectual life? In a collection rife with fantasy and parodic allegory—one that arguably describes *itself* as nine-tenths allegorical—why should it be safe to take the Zhuangzi stories alone as being literal and factual?<sup>21</sup> The only grounds for doing so would be the supposition that such stories were written by ZHUANG Zhou himself or by his immediate disciples, and that the ZHUANG Zhou stories within the collection were literally representing their specific

<sup>18</sup> That is, texts that unironically acknowledge an internally coherent and plausible version of Confucius and his major disciples as the primary and approved authorities.

<sup>19</sup> LIU uses this as evidence that the Inner Chapters were written by Zhuangzi, since disciples might feel licensed to append anecdotes to a master's work but not to slip them into the middle of a chapter. Meanwhile the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, which in LIU's view are not authored by ZHUANG Zhou, observe no such convention. LIU nonetheless favors the possibility that the butterfly dream story might be autobiographical without raising the possibility that, by the same reasoning, any other ZHUANG Zhou anecdote throughout the collection might be as well (LIU 1994: 18).

<sup>20</sup> Admittedly, Graham is suitably agnostic about the actual existence or status of this 'school,' writing, "There is no evidence of an organized school of Chuang-tzu surviving his death and very little of disciples receiving formal instruction in this lifetime" (1981: 115). He goes on to speculate whether the *Zhuangzi* stories were "preserved or invented" (116). Subsequent scholars, including LIU Xiaogan, have been more inclined than Graham himself to take the existence of such 'schools' (or teaching traditions) literally.

<sup>21</sup> The twenty-seventh chapter of the received *Zhuangzi*, "Imputed words" 寓言 begins, "[What I write?] is nine-tenths imputed words" 寓言十九 (WANG 1988: 27.1089).

milieu. That hypothesis is exactly what is under doubt, however. Therefore, one is no longer entitled to take such assumptions for granted.

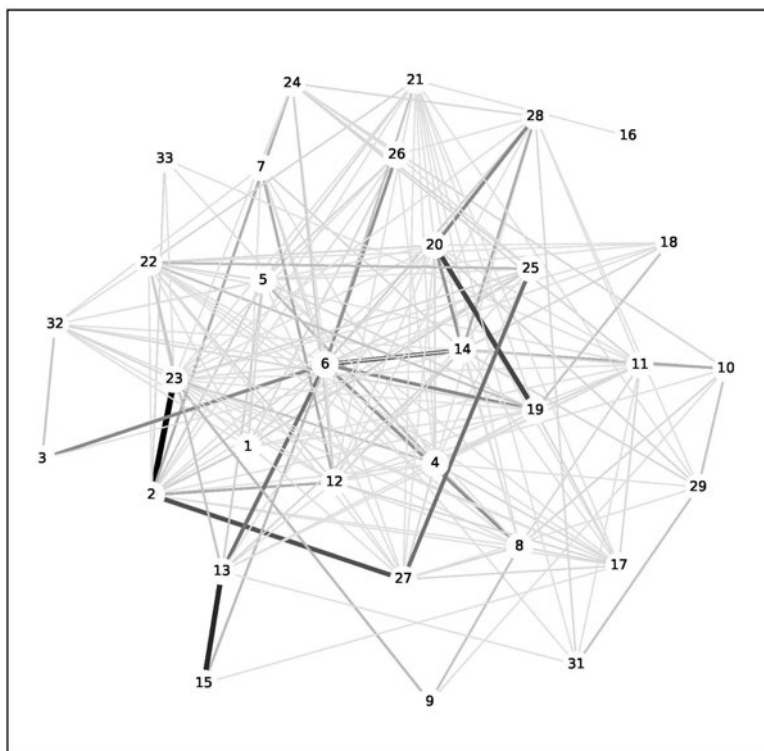
## 2.2 *Portable Anecdotes*

It is a widespread characteristic of early Chinese texts, that they frequently contain anecdotes featuring people who probably actually lived. At the same time, one might hesitate to call these anecdotes ‘historical’ (in the sense of faithfully recording the actual actions or words of these people) because of numerous undermining factors. Examples of these might include the lack of a clear medium of transmission, or a significant gap in time between the historical lifetime of the protagonist and the first evidence of the anecdote. Since for present purposes, both of those aspects are exactly what is under investigation, it seems worthwhile to introduce a third undermining factor, what I would call the *portability* of these anecdotes. That is, at times there is direct or indirect evidence that the anecdote (or a set of its distinctive elements) has *moved* from one protagonist to another. This is a well-known phenomenon in the study of early Chinese texts.<sup>22</sup> It does not necessarily decrease the intellectual or aesthetic value of the stories, but it should decrease our confidence in our ability to use them as evidence about the actual lives of their protagonists.

Before considering the few scenes where Zhuangzi’s supposed disciples appear, I will first give two examples to suggest that Zhuangzi stories in the *Zhuangzi* are by no means immune to worries about portability. The first is the “Discussing Swords” 說劍 chapter, which even among the Miscellaneous Chapters is objectively an outlier (WANG 1988: 30.1215–28). A.C. Graham has described it as “so uncharacteristic of the philosopher that many suppose it to be about someone else of the same name” (Graham 1981: 117). The ruler it features did not overlap in time with other purported contemporaries of ZHUANG Zhou. As regards its use of language, it also does not belong. While every other chapter of the *Zhuangzi* displays some intratextual link with at least one other chapter,<sup>23</sup> “Discussing Swords” alone seems to draw from an entirely different subset of the language. This would suggest that a version of this chapter once existed separately or in another collection entirely: that it was, in my terms, most likely ‘portable,’ even if its hypothesized relatives (featuring a

<sup>22</sup> Many of the essays in van Els & Queen 2017 address this characteristic of early Chinese anecdote use though without employing this specific terminology. Another useful comparison is Michael Hunter’s description of “the ‘Kongzi’ phenomenon” (2017: 12–20). There are far fewer sources for a ‘Zhuangzi’ phenomenon, but the fact that most extant examples are now (by editorial assiduity and/or preservation failures) found within a single text should not be necessarily projected back onto the Warring States textual landscape. See also Fischer 2009 on intertextuality more generally with the *Shizi* 尸子 as a case study.

<sup>23</sup> For present purposes, a ‘link’ is defined as an overlap of more than four consecutive characters. Given that this clumsy brute-force method might slightly overcount links, the unconnectedness of “Discussing Swords” is all the more striking. See Fig. 2.1.



**Fig. 2.1** Chapters in the *Zhuangzi* that share sequences of at least five consecutive characters. Darker lines indicate longer shared sequences. Note the complete absence of chapter 30 (i.e., “Discussing Swords”). Base text from Chinese Text Project (<https://ctext.org>, ed. Donald Sturgeon). Code for data generation written in Python and graph generated using NetworkX (Hagberg et al. 2008), with the generous assistance of Colin Klein

different protagonist) have not survived. Within the field of *Zhuangzi* studies, “Discussing Swords” is such an obviously problematic case that most scholars have avoided giving it much historical weight. At the same time, a surface reading does not obviously disqualify it from being a story about *our* ZHUANG Zhou, and a few scholars do treat it as such.<sup>24</sup>

A second and much more explicit example of portability comes from the “Mountain Tree” 山木 in the Outer Chapters:

莊子衣大布而補之，正纆係履而過魏王。魏王曰：「何先生之憊邪？」莊子曰：「貧也，非憊也。士有道德不能行，憊也。衣弊履穿，貧也，非憊也，此所謂非遭時也。」

WANG 1988: 20.748

Zhuangzi was clothed in coarse cloth that had been patched. Walking with his shoes tied on with twine, he happened to pass the King of Wei. The King of Wei said, “How, sir, have you come to such extremity?” Zhuangzi said, “I am poor, not in extremity. When a man has

<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see below.

the way and virtue without being able to put it into practice, that is being in extremity. Having worn-out clothes and shoes with holes in them is poverty, not extremity. This is what is called ‘not meeting one’s time.’”

This anecdote is closely related to one that not only appears in several Han sources (for example, *Han Shi waizhuan jishi* 1980: 1.11–12; *Shiji* 1959: 67.2208), but also elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi*—specifically, the “Yielding Kingship” 讓王 chapter. There the impoverished protagonist is the Confucian disciple YUAN Xian 原憲 (b.515 BCE), and the wealthy one is Zigong 子貢 (DUANMU Ci 端木賜; 520–456 BCE). The descriptions of YUAN Xian’s poverty vary and generally focus on his house, but he too wears tattered clothes and shoes with holes in them. Zigong asks him, “Oh! How are you in such distress, sir?” 子貢曰:嘻!先生何病? Yuan Xian replies, “I have heard that ‘not having money is called being poor; studying and not being able to act on it is called being in distress.’ Now as for me, I am poor, but not in distress” 憲聞之:無財謂之貧,學而不能行謂之病。今憲,貧也,非病也 (WANG 1988: 28.1138–39).

Like many anecdotes in early Chinese literary culture, this one was clearly portable. It was even able to move from a context starring YUAN Xian and Zigong to one starring Zhuangzi and the King of Wei, though the YUAN Xian branch of the anecdote family is the dominant one. Most likely, any sign of portability with significant variation should undermine our confidence in the precise historicity of an anecdote. Many more surviving Warring States anecdotes that do not now show evidence of such portability were surely portable nonetheless: it is just that their near relatives have not survived. In the case of the anecdote quoted above, it is not heavily relied upon by those attempting to create a ZHUANG Zhou biography of sorts. The anecdotes discussed in the next section, however, are more central.

### 2.3 *Did Zhuangzi Have Disciples?*

Returning now to the question of ZHUANG Zhou’s disciples: the *Zhuangzi* anecdote that contains probably the most concrete evidence for a Zhuangzi disciple—in that it gives the person a name—is the story of ZHUANG Zhou roaming the park at Diaoling 雕陵, also found in the “Mountain Tree” chapter. This anecdote shows traces of being portable in the same way as the YUAN Xian story, though the traces are fainter.<sup>25</sup> It describes how ZHUANG Zhou was “roaming” in a sort of game preserve when he sees an extraordinarily large magpie. The magpie swoops down at

<sup>25</sup> I owe my awareness of this to Stephen Bumbacher’s identification and analysis of the similarity between the two versions of the story, but strongly disagree with his analysis that “clearly both texts must belong to two different textual traditions, going back to different archetypes” (2016: 618). If degrees of relatedness can be placed on a spectrum, the relationship between these two stories would rank lower than verbatim parallel but, in its sharing of detailed elements *and* general import, would certainly rank above pure coincidence or complete unrelatedness.

him, touching his forehead, and then lands in a tree. ZHUANG Zhou stalks it with his crossbow, wondering at its failure to notice to its own danger.

睹一蟬方得美蔭而忘其身；螳螂執翳而搏之，見得而忘其形；異鵲從而利之，見利而忘其真。（WANG 1988: 20.758–59）

Then he spied a cicada that had just settled down in a such lovely bit of shade that it had forgotten its own physical existence. A praying mantis, having concealed itself nearby, suddenly pounced upon the cicada; in seeing the chance for gain it forgot its own physical form. The extraordinary magpie in turn had spotted a chance to profit [from the mantis' distraction] and, seeing that profit, had forgotten its own truth.

The story goes on to describe ZHUANG Zhou's epiphany: he himself is stalking the magpie and takes his own place as a link in the disastrous chain of self-endangerment. To drive the point home, the narrative subsequently has him being chased out of the park by a game-keeper.

A similar tale is found in the *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Han's Outer Commentary on the Odes*). It also features a cicada, a mantis, a bird, and a human. Here the bird is a yellow sparrow and the human is a young boy. The framing is somewhat different—it is a parable supposedly told by SUNSHU Ao 孫叔敖 (ca.630–593 BCE) to King Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (d.591 BCE) in order to dissuade him from attacking the state of Jin 晉—but the purpose and significance of the story seem similar: its upshot is a warning, that getting too wrapped up in the prospect of pleasure or profit leaves one vulnerable to unforeseen dangers. It is true that there are few verbal echoes, but the elements and message are all so similar that it is hard not to see both as originating from a single story. Either they are two different philosophical adaptations of a folk parable, or the author of the *Zhuangzi* piece knew something like the *Han Shi waizhuan* version and significantly adapted it for the particular purpose. It seems less plausible (though not impossible) that the story from the *Zhuangzi* would be made more general and generic for use as a policy argument.

If the existence of a parallel version of the Diaoling story is one factor that might weaken its biographical credibility, another factor is its belonging to a genre of stories that portray a respected thinker being humiliated and/or frightened and forced to rethink his position. Such stories often have three elements: (1) a situation in which the respected figure is unexpectedly brought low, (2) a repertoire of somewhat heavy-handed parodic elements, and (3) a framing dialogue to hammer home the message. A good example in the *Zhuangzi* itself is the “Robber Zhi” 盜跖 story (WANG 1988: 29.1171–93). There, Confucius attempts to flatter the notorious bandit only to be terrified and humiliated by the bandit's fierce rhetoric and forced to flee the encounter (element 1). Elsewhere in the tradition, Robber Zhi stands for the tendency of evil-doers to attain good outcomes, in contrast to Bo Yi and YAN Yuan, do-gooders dogged by ill-fortune (for example, *Shiji* 1959: 61.2124–25). In the story at hand, however, he represents an almost Nietzschean vitality, while Confucius is explicitly made to stand in for enervated and hypocritical moralism (element 2).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In addition to being directly described as “a clever hypocrite” 巧僞人 by Robber Zhi, Confucius himself displays this trait when he requests an audience with the words: “I, KONG Qiu of Lu, have

Finally, in a brief conversation with Robber Zhi's brother LIUXIA Hui, which forms a coda to the story, Confucius shows that he has learned his lesson and has realized that he is no match for Robber Zhi (element 3; WANG 1988: 29.1193). This story would not have originated with anyone who held Confucius as an object of veneration.

The Diaoling story is less extreme but it has all the same elements. ZHUANG Zhou is pursued and berated (逐而誅之) by a gamekeeper (element 1). His characteristic<sup>27</sup> "wandering" (遊) is revealed to be no more than reckless trespassing and attempted poaching; the extraordinarily large<sup>28</sup> "magpie that comes from the south" 一異鵲自南方來者 is a parody of the massive *peng* 鵬 bird that inhabits the southern ocean 南冥 and the rarefied *yuanchu* 鵷鵠 that inhabits the southern region 南方 (WANG 1988: 1.3, 17.633). Bringing the weird magpie into juxtaposition with these magnificent avians has a deflationary aspect: it depicts wandering as reckless inattention, and shows the great bird losing its lofty perspective and getting unexpectedly fixated on a little mantis<sup>29</sup> (element 2). Finally, the story ends with ZHUANG Zhou admitting that he has gone astray and lost track of what was important (element 3; WANG 1988: 20.758–59).

It is in this brief coda that we find ZHUANG Zhou's only named disciple, LIN Ju 蔣且. He is not explicitly described as being a disciple, but he does refer to ZHUANG Zhou as *fuzi* 夫子 (master).<sup>30</sup> The commentator SIMA Biao 司馬彪 (d. 306) finds it necessary to specify that "LIN Ju is Zhuang's disciple" 蔣且, 莊子弟子 (WANG 1988: 20.762), so perhaps the language is not entirely transparent. Is SIMA Biao's comment based on evidence no longer extant or is it just a guess? Another striking feature observed by A.C. Graham is that the same scene has ZHUANG Zhou mentioning a teacher of his own: "I have heard my master say, 'When you enter [a place where there is] a [certain] custom, you [end up] following that custom'" 且吾聞諸夫子曰: 入其俗, 從其俗 (WANG 1988: 20.758–59).<sup>31</sup> The teacher is not named. If, however, it is permissible to read anything into the overall organization of the

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heard that the general has a lofty sense of rightness" 魯人孔丘, 聞將軍高義. Meanwhile, Robber Zhi is engaged in eating human livers (WANG 1988: 29.1172–74). Nor does Confucius have an effective response to Robber Zhi's furious verbal onslaught; he is forced to slink away, dazed and terrified (WANG 1988: 29.1193).

<sup>27</sup> LIU Xiaogan describes the words *you* and *xiaoyao* as possibly being "the most characteristic words in the *Zhuangzi*" (LIU 1994: 22).

<sup>28</sup> Its wingspan is said to be seven *chi* and its eye as big as a sundial (翼廣七尺, 目大運寸; WANG 1988: 20.758).

<sup>29</sup> Note the mantis itself also appears in two different *Zhuangzi* chapters (WANG 1988: 4.148, 12.441), both alluding to what might have been a common trope or idiom that has the mantis waving its arms in an effort to stop a carriage.

<sup>30</sup> Of course, Zhuangzi refers to Huizi the same way while insulting him, and the two seem to be peers (WANG 1988: 1.33).

<sup>31</sup> Most translators take this as prescriptive (for example Graham 1981: 117; Watson 1968: 219), but in context it makes more sense as monitory since ZHUANG Zhou goes on to specify that the custom he "entered into" was forgetting one's true self with perilous result. It is also possible that ZHUANG Zhou's teacher is also being criticized, but this seems a less natural reading.



chapter as it appears today, there might be some significance in the fact that the very next story (and final anecdote of the chapter) features “Master YANG,” generally understood to be YANG Zhu 楊朱, visiting an inn with his disciples (WANG 1988: 20.764). Was this juxtaposition intentional?

Graham speculates that Zhuangzi “studied under a Yangist, and in due course became a qualified Yangist teacher with his own disciples” (Graham 1981: 118). This theory was probably partly inspired by the contention of GUAN Feng, that the *Zhuangzi* and *Lüshi chunqiu* preserved aspects of YANG Zhu’s philosophy, which (GUAN believed) should be defined along the lines of the description found in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, as more concerned with the preservation of life than with the selfishness that Mencius’ characterization implies (GUAN Feng 1962: 89–96).<sup>32</sup>

Looking back over the entire structure of the “Mountain Tree” chapter, it is worth noting that each one of its nine pericopes is concerned with the issue of preserving life.<sup>33</sup> Given that it also features a Yangzi story, one might wonder why Graham did not give it a place among what he classified as the “Yangist chapters,”<sup>34</sup> which he describes as being connected with this theme. The reason is that he interprets the Diaoling story as having an anti-Yangist conclusion: “Chuang-tzu has made the discovery that ‘it is inherent in things that they are tie[d] to each other’, which undermines the hope that one can ensure survival by renouncing external involvements” (Graham 1981: 117, 79). Graham proceeds to use this story as a keystone in his “skeleton biography” of Zhuangzi, and he places it early in Zhuangzi’s life. He suggests that the incident provoked a “crisis” that led Zhuangzi to abandon Yangism and “go his own way” (Graham 1981: 118).

<sup>32</sup>The *Huainanzi* briefly mentions that Yangzi 楊子 opposed (*fei* 非) the Mohist doctrines of “universal love, honoring the worthy, esteeming ghosts, opposing fatalism” (兼愛尚賢, 右鬼非命) and that he in turn “established” (*li* 立) principles of “keeping your nature intact, protecting your authenticity, not allowing things to entangle your form” (全性保真, 不以物累形), a doctrine that (the text notes) was in turn was opposed by Mencius (*Huainanzi jishi* 1998: 13.416; trans. Major et al. 2010: 501). On the “selfish” YANG Zhu, see *Mengzi* 7A.26 (*Mengzi zhushu* 1980: 13B.2768). Although similar themes of preserving one’s nature appear in the *Lüshi chunqiu* (e.g., the “Making Life Fundamental” 本生 chapter, Lü 2002: 1/2.21–34), they are not there associated with Yang Zhu by name. On present evidence, there is no sign of this specific association prior to the *Huainanzi*.

<sup>33</sup>The mountain tree story (1) has already been discussed above. Yiliao from South of the Market describes how animals’ lives are endangered by the desirability of their fine pelts (2). The tax collector escapes danger from disgruntled taxpayers through his plainness (3). Confucius starving between Chen and Cai is taught by Taigong Ren to survive by doing away with his brilliance (4), and taught by Sanghu to survive by disentangling himself from arbitrary connections (5). The story of Zhuangzi being poor but not distressed (discussed above), also contains a message about recognizing when one is born into adverse circumstances and being cautious so as to survive (6). We then find Confucius again between Chen and Cai, but this time as the teacher rather than the student, and his instruction involves merging with Heaven and disentangling one’s self from human enticements (7). The next story is the park at Diaoling (8), and the final story involves Yangzi at the inn, teaching that the way to be loved is to not be overly conscious of one’s own merits (9). Not all of these disparate pieces of advice are mutually consistent, but they could all be justly characterized as strategies for self-preservation.

<sup>34</sup>That is, Chaps. 28, 29, and 31.

Regardless of philosophical classification, several aspects of the story make it unlikely to be factual biographical record. Suppose one ignores biographical implications or chronological speculations and sees *this* ZHUANG Zhou character as a mouthpiece for ideas that might not be ‘his own.’ One can then read the conclusion and the coda of the Diaoling story quite differently. “Ugh!” ZHUANG Zhou says, “Things certainly entangle one another! And two types bring each other about” 噫! 物固相累, 二類相召也. The utterance is cryptic and seems to pre-suppose an understanding of some of these words as technical terms. *Zhuangzi* commentator CHENG Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–655) identifies the “two types” as “benefit and harm” 利害, which seems plausible given the story for which it serves as the moral (WANG 1988: 20.761). That is to say, each creature is focused on its own benefit (the first type) and so courts disaster (the second type). ZHUANG Zhou’s response to this insight is to lock himself inside. He explains his decision to isolate himself by quoting his teacher as saying that one becomes contaminated by the customs of others. This is a frightening thought for him, given the near-fatal recklessness that he has recently observed and has himself participated in.

If this is not a biographical story but rather a “Yangist” (or “life-preservation”) allegory, it could be interpreted as saying that someone like that crazy ZHUANG Zhou would be better off never going out at all, rather than wandering so thoughtlessly around and exposing himself to such dangerous influences. Again, it is hard to see this as originating from a purely “Zhuangist” thinker; it seems more like a critique.<sup>35</sup>

If we did read it as a biographical story, it is one of the few that has a readily available transmitter—LIN Ju. But given the above interpretation, can we be in any way certain that this LIN Ju is a real Zhuangist disciple? And even if someone named LIN Ju was really ZHUANG Zhou’s disciple (in the sense that YAN Hui 顏回 [521–481 BCE] was “really” Confucius’ disciple), are *this* LIN Ju and *this* ZHUANG Zhou plausible reflections of historical figures bearing the same names? Or are they more like the *Zhuangzi*’s Confucius and YAN Hui—shadow puppets being moved across a philosophical stage? Arguments could be made in either direction, but it is possible that the stability of “authentic Zhuangzi transmission” rides on such uncertainties.

LIN Ju is not the only purported disciple of Zhuangzi, even though he is the only one who has a name. The *Zhuangzi* also mentions Zhuangzian disciples in what appears to be a later response to the inner chapters motif<sup>36</sup> of the useless tree.

<sup>35</sup> Note that WANG Shumin takes this story as a ‘fulcrum’ of sorts (to use LIU Xiaogan’s term): “The most important piece of evidence for those who research Zhuangzian thought, this must certainly have been recorded by Zhuangzi” (為研究莊子思想最重要之依據, 此必莊子所記; WANG 1988: 1438). But the second statement does not follow from the first. It may be, as I have argued, that this anecdote is in tension with other aspects of Zhuangzian thought. Even if I am wrong and the anecdote does (contrary to my view) illustrate a key aspect of Zhuangzian thought, it could still have been the imaginative composition of some later person, loosely inspired by a version of the anecdote like the one found in the *Han Shi waizhuan*.

<sup>36</sup> The distribution of useless tree stories in the Inner Chapters is limited to the first and fourth chapters (WANG 1988: 1.35–38, 4.150–56, 4.158, 4.163), and their interrelations are somewhat



Coincidentally (or not), this anecdote is also found in the “Mountain Tree” chapter. It is first worth pointing out that the useless tree itself is a “preservation of life” motif. The basic point of all the variations of it found in the *Zhuangzi* (and associated stories like the muddy turtle and sacrificial ox) is that being useful is damaging or fatal, while being useless is conducive to survival and flourishing.<sup>37</sup> The “Mountain Tree” anecdote begins with a short version of the useless tree story that parallels the various inner chapters versions. This time “Zhuangzi” has a short conversation with a woodcutter about why he would not cut the big mountain tree. The anecdote then continues:

夫子出於山，舍於故人之家。故人喜，命豎子殺鴈而烹之。豎子請曰：「其一能鳴，其一不能鳴，請奚殺？」主人曰：「殺不能鳴者。」明日，弟子問於莊子曰：「昨日山中之木，以不材得終其天年；今主人之鴈，以不材死。先生將何處？」莊子笑曰：「周將處夫材與不材之間。」 (WANG 1988: 20.719)

The master (*fuzi*) came down out of the mountains and stayed the night at the home of an old friend. His friend was delighted and ordered his kitchen boy to kill a goose and cook it. The kitchen boy begged to know, “Which goose should I kill? The one that can honk or the one that cannot?” The host said, “Kill the one that cannot honk.” The next day his disciples asked Zhuangzi, “Yesterday the mountain tree could live out its days because of its uselessness, but the host’s mute goose *died* because of its uselessness. Sir, what position will you take?” Zhuangzi laughed and said, “Zhou would take the space between use and uselessness.”

He goes on to give a long and poetic speech how even that in-between space is not safe and that the real key is to avoid entanglements. This is not a critique of Zhuangzi in the same way that the Diaoling story is. It allows Zhuangzi to successfully answer his critics rather than be bested by them. But it is difficult to take this anecdote seriously as a literal episode in ZHUANG Zhou’s biography. It seems far too coincidental, contrived, and philosophically convenient to have happened exactly as written. What are the chances that, in actual life, two highly convenient, contradictory illustrations of the Zhuangzian uselessness principle would happen to come up in one day? And if there is a chance that it did not happen exactly as written, then there is also a high probability that the unnamed “disciples” who figure in the story are also a rhetorical figment rather than an historical reality. At the very least, the value of this anecdote as solid evidence for their existence is much weakened.

The only other place ZHUANG Zhou’s disciples are mentioned is the story of Zhuangzi’s own death. The anecdote begins by noting that “when Zhuangzi was about to die, his disciple(s) wanted to give him a lavish burial” 莊子將死，弟子欲厚葬之 but that Zhuangzi refused with a speech in elegant parallel prose including the intention to “take heaven and earth as my coffins” 以天地為棺槨 and “the myriad things as mourners” 萬物為殯送。A disciple (who uses singular first-person pronoun *wu* 吾) protests by expressing the fear that crows and vultures will eat “the master” (*fuzi* 夫子), but Zhuangzi famously replies, “above ground [my body] will

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peculiar. They seem to repeat the same message in different ways—as if reflecting different versions of the same portable anecdote—without building on it as one would expect from a single-authored chapter that was designed to fit together as a connected, continuous piece.

<sup>37</sup> For an extensive discussion of the uselessness motif in the *Zhuangzi*, see Major 1975.

be eaten by crows and vultures, below ground by mole-cricket and ants; how unfair to snatch from those to give to these!” 在上為烏鳶食，在下為螻蟻食，奪彼與此，何其偏也！(WANG 1988: 32.1289). These are excellent deathbed words, exactly what Zhuangzi would say, and they are often taken literally.

Their very excellence should give cause for concern however. Although little general work has been done on deathbed scenes in early China,<sup>38</sup> there is no reason to doubt the applicability of the conclusion that “dying speeches and last words are, loosely speaking, a literary genre, artifacts, not historical documents like last wills or death certificates” and that as far as literal authenticity is concerned, “the last word that fits the known character so well is suspect for that very reason” (Guthke 1993: 96, 95). Psychologist Robert Kastenbaum points out that “deathbed scenes are symbolic constructions that draw upon both idiosyncratic personal experiences and culturally available themes, events, and meaning fragments” and even by eye-witnesses, “the ‘same’ death might be represented very differently over a period of time” (Kastenbaum 2000: 255). This is to say that even the process of narrating a death scene one has literally witnessed is subject to a certain level of revision and mythmaking.<sup>39</sup> And “when it comes to the dying pronouncements of famous men, the memory and motive of the living conspire against authenticity in any single case” (Toher 2012: 39).

Very little is known about the historical ZHUANG Zhou’s social milieu. A useful comparison case, however, is the death scenes of Zengzi 曾子 (Zeng Shen 曾參; 505–435 BCE) as narrated in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) and *Liji* 禮記 (*Record of Rites*). In one of the *Lunyu* narratives, Zengzi ceremoniously quotes the *Shi* 詩 (*Odes*); in another he pronounces that “when a person is near death, his words are excellent” 人之將死，其言也善 and proceeds to produce appropriately weighty platitudes (*Lunyu* 8.3–4; *Lunyu zhushu* 8.2486). By contrast, in the *Liji* narrative, Zengzi is made fatally anxious by a servant boy’s remark about his mat and (in Michael Ing’s analysis) “literally dies in his pursuit of [ritual] competency” (Ing 2012: 201; see *Liji zhengyi* 1980: 6.1277). Perhaps one could find something to admire in such dedication. Nonetheless, when combined with the notice a few lines later that “in the mourning rites for Zengzi, [his body] was washed in the kitchen” (possibly an apocryphal detail “meant as a subtle critique of his austerity”), it is easy to agree with Ing’s speculation that these scenes “were edited or written by competing schools of early Confucians who had an anti-Zengzi bias” (Ing 2012: 202–03).

The object of present concern as regards the *Zhuangzi* is not the deathbed words as such but the framing scene with attendant disciple(s). What degree of confidence can justifiably be placed in the historical existence of this unnamed character (or characters)? As much as in the boy who remarked on Zengzi’s mat? Less, I would argue. For there to be deathbed words, there must be a witness to record them. Zengzi’s servant boy is shushed by the Zengzi disciple YUEZHENG Zichun 樂正子

<sup>38</sup> For studies of deathbed scenes of specific figures, see Durrant 1995: 2–8 (Sima Tan); Ing 2012: 200–02 (Zengzi).

<sup>39</sup> Compare Durrant’s meditations on SIMA Qian’s (re)construction of his dying father’s last words (1995: 2–8).

春, and the attendance of Zengzi's sons ZENG Yuan 曾元 and ZENG Shen 曾申 is also carefully noted (*Liji zhengyi* 1980: 6.1277). No such specificity attends *Zhuangzi's* deathbed scene. It is of course not impossible that Zhuangzi had a disciple (or disciples), but this scene is not very good evidence for it. This Zhuangzian disciple is present out of generic necessity, and for the purpose of engaging in a deathbed dialogue that is suspiciously perfect.

There is no lack of master-disciple relationships in the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, its teaching scenes are so frequent and multifarious that the dynamics of this relationship might even be said to constitute a preoccupation of the text (see Defoort 2012). In the *Zhuangzi*, these relationships are toyed with, challenged, undermined, inverted, transformed.<sup>40</sup> This does not necessarily constitute evidence for Zhuangzian disciples, however; it rather implies that at least some *Zhuangzi* authors entertained serious doubts about the legitimacy of conventional master-disciple learning. As Carine Defoort puts it, in the *Zhuangzi* “learners learn while teachers do not teach” (Defoort 2012: 472).

Supposing then Zhuangzi did have disciples. What would he have taught them? Surely it would not have been related to textual matters. Nor would studying with such a master seem conducive to good future job prospects. Considering the sort of disciples who would see the appeal in following a person like the Zhuangzi portrayed in the text that bears his name. Would they really have compiled a *Zhuangzi* text from his “dust and leavings” 糟魄 (WANG 1988: 13.498–99)? Could there really be a school of Zhuangzi when his [Toeless Cripple] avatar mocked Confucius for “surrounding himself with such a gaggle of schoolboys” 彼何賓賓以學子為 and suggests that a person of real spiritual advancement would “consider such [company] to be fetters and handcuffs to him” 是為己桎梏 (WANG 1988: 5.184)? Several generations after the putative historical ZHUANG Zhou, HAN Fei would list in great detail the branches of the Ru and Mo schools, but there is no hint of a Zhuang school, much less Yangists, Primitivists, Anarchists, or the like (*Han Feizi jiji* 2003: 50.456–64).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See for example the playful parody of master-disciple lineages narrated by Nü Yu 女偶 (rendered by Watson as “Woman Crookback”). The parodic nature of the ‘genealogy’ is revealed by the fact that all the names of the lineage teachers are obviously allegorical: in Watson’s renderings, Aided-by-Ink (*Fumo* 副墨), Repeated-Recitation (*Luosong* 洛誦), Seeing-Brightly (*Zhanming* 瞻明), Whispered-Agreement (*Nixu* 聶許), Waiting-for-Use (*Xuyi* 需役), Exclaimed-Wonder (*Ou* 謳), Dark-Obscurity (*Xuanming* 玄冥), Participation-in-Mystery (*Canliao* 參寥), and Copy-the-Source (*Nishi* 疑始). Trans. Watson 1968: 82–83; WANG 1988: 6.237–41.

<sup>41</sup> This point is made, though very flippantly, in Mansvelt Beck 2000: 10–13. Interestingly, he draws the exact opposite conclusion about it, opining that “the arguments against Zhuangzi’s authorship are never very strong anyway” (12) and insisting that “thought must be accredited to someone—not to a motley bunch of unknown individuals” (13). This is a version of JIANG Tao’s worry, that “the destabilization of authorship” can “put philosophical projects in jeopardy” (2016: 44). I would argue instead that among a motley bunch of unknown individuals, there might still have been geniuses or at least moments of genius. Suppose through some quirk of fate or cultural change, every author’s name was removed from every title page and every bibliography of every book ever written. Would the brilliance of those books be “dimmed,” as Mansvelt Beck argues,

Such arguments are naturally inconclusive, and it is impossible to know for certain. That said, the thinness of the purported disciples' historical traces and the paradoxical nature of their course of study should at least lower the scholarly world's implicit confidence about their role in *Zhuangzi* transmission. The sections below further explore some evidence about and alternative pictures of *Zhuangzi* text formation.

But first a question that ought to be raised: do such doubts about the 'authenticity' of various *Zhuangzi* stories (and the purported personal involvement of ZHUANG Zhou in their composition) place his entire existence or status under threat? Should his devoted defenders take up cudgels on his behalf? There is no need. There is nothing here to deny the existence of a historical Zhuangzi, and we can all remain entitled to our private theories about him. That said, there is less warrant than generally assumed for placing a high credence in the proposition that the historical Zhuangzi directly authored the inner chapters or indeed any given part of the *Zhuangzi*. This is not to argue against his authorship (or existence), but just to say that a greater degree of epistemic caution is indicated.

### 3 Qin and Early Han Textual Culture and *Zhuangzi* Text Formation

How did texts move and mingle in early China? Excavated texts like the "Nature comes from Fate" 性自命出, "Black Robes" 緇衣, and subsets of the *Laozi* all suggest that some texts circulated in multiple versions while still being recognizably the same work. It seems likely that shorter texts would sometimes conglomerate, or that a larger stable textual unit might absorb smaller units and thereby expand.<sup>42</sup> "Black Robes" is a good example of this: despite featuring as an independent manuscript in more than one excavated version, it is difficult to stop thinking of it or referring to it as "the 'Black Robes' chapter of the *Liji*." Were it not for accidents of preservation, we would not necessarily have guessed at its independent existence or the degree to which it apparently predates the compilation with which it has long been associated. The *Laozi* too has given rise to intriguing debates over text formation: the three Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts comprise a virtually non-overlapping set of abbreviated *Laozi* verses that represent a third of the received text (minus the last fifteen chapters) but bear little relation to its now-standard ordering. Were these "best of" selections from an existing complete text? or were they precursors, bodies of source materials? The question is debated, with good scholars on both sides.<sup>43</sup>

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absent the figures of their authors (11)? Or would different valuable insights, perhaps equally brilliant, potentially be gained?

<sup>42</sup> Such a process is hypothesized for the last fifteen sections of the *Daodejing* in Perkins 2014. It was likely more common than surviving evidence suggests since a successful conglomeration would tend to efface or obscure evidence of its predecessors.

<sup>43</sup> Cook 2012 (I): 199–205 gives a helpful summary of the debate.

The Guodian tomb was sealed during or just after the lifetime of the historical ZHUANG Zhou.<sup>44</sup> Witnesses to what is now the *Zhuangzi* text (or its precursors) tend to come from a slightly later period.<sup>45</sup> Archaeological evidence regarding the *Zhuangzi* has also been relatively sparse, and much of what we have from either excavated or transmitted sources is highly equivocal. Nonetheless the following sections show that examining available evidence from the perspective of a different set of starting assumptions might plausibly lead to unconventional conclusions about the *Zhuangzi*'s authorship.

### 3.1 *The Rise of Internal Textual Divisions*

Studies about the dating and authorship of the *Zhuangzi* rely heavily on the three internal divisions of the received text: the Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters. There is evidence for the existence of at least two of these divisions going back to the early Eastern Han,<sup>46</sup> though this is no guarantee that the contents of those divisions exactly mirrored those of the received text. In a recent reflection on

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<sup>44</sup>Bumbacher (2016: 613) points out that “there are three different times when ZHUANG Zhou is said to have been active,” namely, a) during the reigns of Kings Hui of Liang 梁惠王 (r. 370–319 BCE) and Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 (r. 319–301 BCE), already quite a big span, b) during the reign of Marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯 (r. 424–387 BCE), or c) during the reign of Duke Ai of Lu (r. 494–469 BCE), which would make him a contemporary of Confucius. The ruler in “Discussing Swords,” that is, “King Wen of Zhao,” is generally identified as King Huiwen of Zhao (趙惠文王, r. 298–266 BCE). This would add a fourth time period into the mix, but perhaps it is better to interpret this as further evidence that the “*Zhuangzi*” of this chapter is not the historical ZHUANG Zhou. Bumbacher adds that this profusion of improbable dates “could be interpreted as seeming to imply that ZHUANG Zhou, as a historical person, most likely never existed, but rather was invented by the authors of the *Zhuang zi*.” This heavily qualified statement leaves me unsure as to whether Bumbacher is advocating this theory or not, but personally I believe that the preponderance of evidence clusters around a date of 320 BCE for ZHUANG Zhou and the outliers are explicable by the habitually anachronistic anecdote-formation practices of early imperial China.

<sup>45</sup>Li X. (2006, 2018) observed that a version of a saying found in the Guodian manuscript “Thicket of Sayings” 語叢 (dated ca. 300 BCE) occurs in the *Zhuangzi* “Rifling Trunks” 肱篋 (ch.10). On the strength of this (and a few other pieces of highly equivocal evidence), he concludes that this chapter must have been early and from the hand of Zhuangzi. I feel compelled to respectfully disagree. The very fact that this saying is included in a “Thicket of Sayings” shows that it is highly portable; another version is even found elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi*. There is no reason to believe that the author of “Rifling Trunks” originated it. Early Chinese conventions of intertextuality did not demand explicit framing when quoting well-known sayings, no more than contemporary English language conventions do. To be clear, I have no particular objection to an early date for “Rifling Trunks.” I just do not consider the appearance of this saying in the “Thicket of Sayings” to be good evidence even for that, much less for ZHUANG Zhou's personal authorship of the piece.

<sup>46</sup>Specifically, the intriguing *Jingdian shiwen* comment on a line from the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, “Discussion on Making Things Equal”: “Regarding ‘The Way has never yet begun to have a boundary,’ CUI [Zhu]an says, ‘There are seven pericopes in the ‘Making Things Equal’ [chapter]. This [line] connects to the pericope above. Yet BAN Gu explained it as being in the Outer Chapters” (《夫道未始有封》崔云,齊物七章,此連上章,而班固說在外篇; WANG 1988: 2.73).

methodology in textual studies, LIU Xiaogan has described the “division between the Inner and the Outer and Miscellaneous chapters [as] a historical heritage” and claims that “the findings of modern linguistic analyses are merely a test and proof of the general reliability of the conventional arrangement of the book” (LIU 2018: 41). This conventional arrangement is indeed inherited by us from editors in the distant past—but which editors, and in how distant a past? This is a truly open question, and I am certainly not the only scholar to hold that a confident assumption of their “general reliability” can stretch no further back than GUO Xiang, at best (see Bumbacher 2016).

The structural convention of dividing books into an inner (*nei* 內) and an outer (*wai* 外) part is thoroughly familiar to the modern Chinese reader. Since the *Zhuangzi* famously and strikingly contains such divisions, it is tempting to project them back to the time of ZHUANG Zhou. YU Jiayi, who did not question ZHUANG Zhou’s authorship of the *Zhuangzi* (both Inner and non-Inner Chapters) did just this. His wording emphasizes the anomalousness of it, however: “In antiquity there was a single-authored book that was divided into ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’” 古有一人所著書，而分為內外者。As evidence he quotes a difficult-to-interpret statement by LU Deming in the *Zhuangzi yinyi*: “The Inner establishes names with respect to the Outer” 內者對外立名。He also quotes CHENG Xuanying’s elaboration on the difference between the *Zhuangzi* Inner and Outer sections but adds, “This is only able to explain the *Zhuangzi* and cannot be generalized to other books” 此但可釋莊子而已，未能悉通之於他書也。He goes on to argue that “LIU Xiang was responsible for most cases of a single book being divided into inner and Outer Chapters” 凡一書之內，自分內外者，多出於劉向 (YU Jiayi 1985: 109–10). Close readings of surviving records from the *Bie lu* 別錄 (*Separate records*) show that this is quite plausible (Goldin 2020: 5–12).

As regards the *Zhuangzi*, then, there are three possibilities. First, it could be that it is an extreme outlier and that its putative Warring States or Qin compilers either invented, or were among the earliest adopters of, the convention of having Inner and Outer Chapters. Second, it is possible that the *Zhuangzi* was first compiled, with Inner and Outer Chapter divisions, sometime in the Western Han, making it less of an outlier. Third, it is possible that the *Zhuangzi* was first compiled without Inner or Outer Chapter divisions and that it later acquired them.

I would argue that the evidence favors the third possibility. The *Shiji* account of *Zhuangzi* does not mention internal divisions in the work associated with him, describing it only as a text of “one hundred thousand words” 十餘萬言 (*Shiji* 1959: 63.2143). When later scholars list representative chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, they tend to be from the Inner Chapters, particularly “Wandering Freely” 逍遙遊 and “Discussion of Making Things Equal” 齊物論,<sup>47</sup> but SIMA Qian mentions only Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters. There has been considerable scholarly argument

<sup>47</sup> One could cite various examples, but a prominent one is SU Shi’s 蘇軾 lines to WEN Tong 文同 (1019–79), “Barely a handful of pure verses from that powerful brush:/ Roaming carefree, equalizing things, you follow ZHUANG Zhou” (清詩健筆何足數，逍遙齊物追莊周; *Su Shi shi ji* 1982: 6.250–51). Note that FENG Youlan also suggested that these two chapters should be taken as



about why, but at the very least one can say this: there is nothing in his remarks to suggest that his edition had a recognizable core of Inner Chapters that matches today's complement (see Klein 2010: 22–25). The two *Zhuangzi* stories SIMA Qian cites to illustrate ZHUANG Zhou's life are both from non-Inner Chapters and emphasize his lack of interest in holding office (*Shiji* 1959: 63.2144; compare WANG 1988: 32.1287–88).<sup>48</sup>

Suppose we were to set aside the assumption that the *Zhuangzi* was divided into Inner and Outer Chapters from the outset. What would otherwise be the first known exemplar of such textual divisions? If we do not insist on the specific use of Inner/Outer terminology, we might point to the *Lüshi chunqiu*, which has large, non-chronological<sup>49</sup> internal divisions, called examinations 覽 (eight chapters), discourses 論 (six chapters), and almanacs 紀 (twelve chapters). The *Hanshu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han*) account of the *Huainanzi*'s compilation strongly implies that an Inner/Outer division was also part of that work's conception:

招致賓客方術之士數千人，作為內書二十一篇，外書甚眾，又有中篇八卷，言神仙黃白之術，亦二十餘萬言。（*Hanshu* 1962: 44.2145）

[The king of Huainanzi, Liu An (164–122 BCE),] summoned and convened several thousand guests and visitors and masters of esoteric techniques to create an 'inner book' consisting of twenty-one chapters; an 'outer book' that was longer; and a 'middle book' consisting of eight sections, which discussed the yellow and white techniques of the spirit immortals and amounted to an additional 200,000 words. (Trans. Puett and Queen 2014: 6)

If this is correct (and not a projection by BAN Gu 班固 [32–92], the *Hanshu* compiler, of the *Huainanzi* that he knew), it would be the first clear instance of Inner/Outer division.<sup>50</sup> Both the *Lüshi chunqiu* and the *Huainanzi* are anthologies. Both (though particularly the *Huainanzi*) have special relationships of significant implicit quotation and/or text reuse with the *Zhuangzi*. Either of these big collaborative and well-funded projects would make a good candidate for innovations in book organization and production. Both make better candidates than a hypothesized group of unnamed *Zhuangzi* followers who otherwise left no traces on the intellectual landscape.

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the core of the *Zhuangzi* and that the authorship of the others should be determined by how well they fit together with these two (2000: 344–47).

<sup>48</sup> Bumbacher (2016: 642–43), based on a comparison with Ji Kang's 嵇康 (223–269) *Gao shi zhuan* 高士傳 (*Traditions of Eminent Gentlemen*), argues convincingly that the received *Zhuangzi* represents the youngest of the three recensions and that the earlier *Zhuangzi* recensions probably looked more like what is found in the *Shiji*. See also WANG 1988: 17.631.

<sup>49</sup> Internal divisions based on time, for example, the reigns of successive rulers, are likely to have been a much earlier feature witnessed in such texts as the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn*) of Lu and the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Commentary*). But conceptually such chronicle-divisions are very different from Inner/Outer divisions. From this perspective, the thematic seasonal calendar of the *Lüshi chunqiu* could even be seen as a conceptually transitional form.

<sup>50</sup> Some earlier texts might be taken as reflecting an Inner/Outer division, such as the relationship between the *Zuozhuan* and the *Guoyu*. There is good reason to believe that it was only retrospective authorial construction in the Han dynasty that assigned them both to Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 (556–451 BCE), however.

### 3.2 *Possible Relationships Between Zhuangzi and Lüshi Chunqiu*

Much of the material now found in the *Zhuangzi* was likely to have been composed in the Warring States, but the editorial work that brought this material together is much more likely to have been done in the Qin and early Western Han. As yet, the evidence is quite fragmentary and scattered. Even so, it seems permissible to at least sketch some hypotheses about what the *Zhuangzi* text formation could have looked like if we were to view it, as proposed here, more as an anthology than as a single-authored work or even a single-master lineage text.

The *Lüshi chunqiu* was compiled by a diverse group of scholars under the patronage of Lü Buwei (291–235 BCE) beginning around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. The twelve almanacs were likely the first to be completed and include a “Postface” that can be dated to 239 BCE. Lü Buwei subsequently became embroiled in political difficulties, leading to his removal from the post of prime minister in 237 BCE and his suicide in 235 BCE. As a result, the rest of the book, comprising its other two sections, “seems to have been hastily finalized and could not follow his original plan for it” (Roth 2003: 203; see also Knoblock and Reigel 2000: 27–32).

There is a special relationship between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Lüshi chunqiu*. It is impossible to say for certain what that relationship is. There are at least twenty-six parallel passages between the two texts, and almost half of them involve the *Zhuangzi*’s “Yielding Kingship.”<sup>51</sup> The remaining parallels involve twelve other *Zhuangzi* chapters spread across the three divisions.

LIU Xiaogan argues that the *Zhuangzi* must have been complete and available as a source by the time of the *Lüshi chunqiu*’s compilation, since passages from what LIU takes to be its latest stratum are paralleled in the *Lüshi chunqiu*. As Harold Roth has pointed out, however, the flaw in this logic is that Liu “assumes without question and without establishing criteria for directionality of borrowing that the *Chuang Tzu* is always the source” (Roth 2003: 198). Roth himself speculated that “an early recension [of the *Zhuangzi*] was brought to the Ch’in court by a follower of Chuang Tzu who later penned the chapters Graham calls ‘Primitivist’ (i.e., ch.8–10).” According to Roth’s story, this person may also have “compiled the collection of narratives in ‘Yielding the Throne’ and tried his hand at using some of them in ‘Robber Zhi’ and ‘The Old Fisherman’” (Roth 2003: 213). Although evidence for Roth’s scenario is merely suggestive rather than definitive, it is still plausible enough to form a viable alternative to LIU’s “(nearly) completed *Zhuangzi*” theory.

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<sup>51</sup> For a list of these parallels and a discussion of their significance, see Roth 2003: 207–10.



### 3.3 *Archaeology, Independent Chapters, and Zhuangzi Text Formation*

A version of the *Zhuangzi*—or a collection of proto-*Zhuangzi* materials—was interred in Tomb #1 at Shuanggudui, Fuyang 阜陽雙古堆 (Anhui 安徽), which was sealed circa 165 BCE. The tomb had been robbed in ancient times, and further damage was done due to unfortunate weather during the excavation process. As a result, the slips that survive are badly damaged, many preserving only a few characters. Nonetheless, beautiful and painstaking work has been done by teams at the Fuyang Local Museum and Bureau of Cultural Relics. HU Pingsheng 胡平生 et al. (2014) have carefully matched the fragments to the received *Zhuangzi*. Even these tiny fragments give us fascinating information about the text, as HU et al. note.

First, these slips can clearly be matched to what are now Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous Chapters (see Table 2.1 below), with by far the largest number of characters and slips paralleling what is now the *Zhuangzi* “Under Heaven” 天下 chapter (HU Pingsheng et al. 2014: 89). Second, there are some fragments that, based on their formal features, appear to belong to the *Zhuangzi* materials but do not have close transmitted counterparts. HU et al. have speculatively matched them to

**Table 2.1** Fuyang fragments and corresponding chapters in the received *Zhuangzi*

Received <i>Zhuangzi</i> chapter	Fragment number(s)	Total characters
1逍遙遊 <sup>a</sup>	1	3
4人間世	2	3
6大宗師	3	2
7應帝王	4–7	15
8駢拇	8–9	7
11在宥	10–13	17
12天地	14–16	9
(12? 天地)	43	3
18至樂 <sup>b</sup>	17–18	5
19達生	19–21	9
21田子方	22–26	15
22知北遊	27–28	6
24徐無鬼	29	3
25則陽	30	5
(29? 盜跖)	44	3
31漁父	31	3
33天下	32–42	49

Based on HU Pingsheng et al. 2014: 189–196

<sup>a</sup>The fragment in question contains the characters *you niao yan* 有鳥焉. It is perfectly reasonable for HU Pingsheng et al. to match them with the more famous passage in the *Zhuangzi*’s first chapter, but it is equally plausible that they instead are witness to a passage from “The Mountain Tree” (chapter 20) which also contains that sequence

<sup>b</sup>Fragment 17, which contains only the characters *sui er* 隨而, could also be matched with a passage now found in “Yielding Kingship” (chapter 28)

text from the received *Zhuangzi* (HU Pingsheng et al. 2014: 195–96; fragments 43–44), but identifications are fairly tentative.

Third, and perhaps most interesting, previously published fragments (HAN Ziqiang 2000) that parallel the story of Lord Yuan of Song's tortoise in the *Zhuangzi* "External Things" 外物 chapter are included in HU Pingsheng et al. but prefaced by the conclusion that "it appears from the calligraphic style that these fragments belong together with writing found on the *Shuolei zashi* 說類雜實 slips [that is, a different text] and do not belong with the *Zhuangzi* slips" (HU Pingsheng et al. 2014: 196).<sup>52</sup>

Finally, it is worth giving some weight to the authors' admittedly speculative conclusion, that, based on what they have seen of the fragments, "it is difficult for us to believe that what was interred in the tomb [in antiquity] was the full [fifty-two chapter] *Zhuangzi*" (HU Pingsheng et al. 2014: 197). Due to the poor state of preservation of the tomb, it is impossible to be certain; still, this team is surely in a better epistemic position vis-à-vis its contents than almost anyone else alive today.

This data, fragmentary though it is, does rule out several hypotheses. First, as HU Pingsheng et al. also note, it no longer seems reasonable to conclude that all the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters are products of the Han or post-Han period. At latest they could be very early Western Han. Similarly, it rules out the hypothesis that all the Inner Chapters are products of the Han or post-Han period (but does not rule out the hypothesis that *some* of them are).

It is particularly risky in the case of the Fuyang materials to make arguments from absence, since it is clear that a great deal of material was lost. Still it is worth noting, with a very low degree of confidence, that there is no evidence for an unbroken sequence of Inner Chapters. What we do find, however, is material from each chapter in a nearly unbroken sequence from chapters 18–22. This admittedly weak case is made just slightly stronger by the fact that the three characters on fragment 1 (*you niao yan* 有鳥焉), which HU Pingsheng et al. match to "Wandering Freely" (chapter 1), also appear in "Mountain Tree" (chapter 20), thus potentially closing the gap.<sup>53</sup> Alternatively "Mountain Tree," which as noted above is odd in several different ways, might not have originally been part of this sequence.

The case of the Lord Yuan of Song's tortoise, together with the educated guess that the Fuyang fragments were not originally a full *Zhuangzi* text, is much more suggestive. A proponent of the anthology hypothesis could find here an instructive "missing link" between the very large *Zhuangzi* text available to SIMA Qian and its Warring States ancestors. The evidence as we have it does not rule out, and indeed supports, the following picture of *Zhuangzi* text formation: the creator(s) of the Fuyang text had available to them some very ancient scraps—some subset of fragments 1–7 (or 2–7), now corresponding to Inner Chapters passages, and others that

<sup>52</sup> Of the fragments from two other chapters also published in HAN Ziqiang 2000, one (with a parallel in the *Zhuangzi* "Zeyang" chapter) is found in HU Pingsheng et al. 2014, while the other (with a parallel in the *Zhuangzi* "Yielding Kingship" chapter) is not mentioned at all.

<sup>53</sup> It is possible that chapters 24 and 25 also belong in this sequence, since they have certain rhetorical features in common with chapters 21 and 22.

now correspond to non-Inner Chapters. Perhaps these scraps came bundled together with less ancient material (or other ancient material from a different source) that thematically seemed to belong with the proto-*Zhuangzi* materials, and so was also copied in.

In the tortoise story, we find quite a clear illustration of the conditions under which material from disparate sources might come together. Once these particular texts were interred, of course, it is highly unlikely that anyone saw them or did anything further with them. Still, before being interred they were (or at least could have been) spatially co-located at some point. We can imagine, therefore, the library of the tomb occupants (XIAHOU Zao 夏侯灶, the second lord of Ruyin 汝陰, and his wife) before their deaths. It contained a *Zhuangzi*-like text<sup>54</sup> that probably did not even have all the materials found in our received (abridged) version—not to mention SIMA Qian's or BAN Gu's fifty-two chapter recension(s). Their library also contained another text, the *Shuolei zashi*, that included the story of Lord Yuan of Song's tortoise. In this scenario, suppose someone came to visit and was permitted to copy some of the texts in the library. That person leaves with some *Zhuangzi*-like materials and some *Shuolei zashi* materials, in the same calligraphic hand and perhaps even in the same bundle of slips! If, as we have every reason to suspect, overall textual identity and authorship were not scrupulously marked in this period, the material copied in by the Lord of Ruyin's visitor would now all be eligible for inclusion in the *Zhuangzi* anthology unless ruled out by a later editor/reader for internal reasons.

Now imagine this process iterated on multiple occasions over a broad stretch of space and time. Supposing that guests did not always exhaustively reproduce the textual material they encountered, but rather selected according to idiosyncratic individual criteria. The result would be a branching, a proliferation: multiple texts with overlapping but non-identical (and increasingly divergent?) content. Occasionally a batch of such texts might collect in the hands of a person devoted either to “*Zhuangzian*” thought or to the editorial side of text-making. That person might go through a process similar to that described by LIU Xiang: putting all the textual material together, eliminating the duplicates and anything that seemed not to fit, and repackaging what was left as a single text. We know this consolidation and/or trimming process occurred multiple times in the *Zhuangzi*'s history, likely with LIU Xiang, with GUO Xiang, and probably others as well. It seems likely (*contra* the most radical doubters of antiquity) that LIU Xiang added only a now-lost preface, but our earlier aficionados could have added whole chapters of their own composition.<sup>55</sup>

A different stage in this same process might be seen in the other excavated “*Zhuangzi*” text, forty-four slips from tomb #136 at Zhangjiashan 張家山, which as

<sup>54</sup> It is unclear whether it makes sense to call it “a version of the *Zhuangzi*”: current evidence only bears solid witness to one passage mentioning *Zhuangzi* (from “Under Heaven”, chapter 33). Fragments that seem to parallel a second *Zhuangzi* passage (from “Utmost Happiness”, chapter 18) could, as mentioned above, also be witnessing a passage in “Yielding Kingship.”

<sup>55</sup> This is Roth's speculation as regards the Syncretists (Roth 1991).

of this writing have not been fully published. Their contents have been characterized by LIAO Mingchun 廖名春 (1998) as being a complete version of the Robber Zhi story now found in the first part of *Zhuangzi* chapter 29. The group of slips also bore the title “Robber Zhi” (though the second character is a variant). The tomb was sealed in 167 BCE, very close in time to the Fuyang tomb, though distant geographically (around 600 km apart). More than eight hundred slips were found in the tomb at Zhangjiashan, and perhaps it is not justified to assume that the “Robber Zhi” story was the only piece of that find to parallel the *Zhuangzi*. Suppose this is indeed the case, however. Is it justified to call this, as Stephen Bumbacher for example does, “a whole chapter of the *Zhuang zi*” (Bumbacher 2016: 631)? It seems just as plausible that this was a separately circulating piece that at some point got pulled into the orbit of the *Zhuangzi* text.

Further evidence regarding this particular chapter might be found in the digital investigations of text reuse carried out by Donald Sturgeon (2017). His data highlights the fact that a handful of *Zhuangzi* chapters have “significant reuse relationships” (that is, lengthy textual parallels) with other texts. The “Robber Zhi” chapter is one of these and is interesting in having such a relationship with both the *Mozi* and the *Xunzi* 荀子 (Sturgeon 2017).<sup>56</sup> More than most other chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, the “Robber Zhi” chapter is employing a shared Warring States repertoire of examples and phrases, suggesting that it was originally conceived for a wider audience and different purpose than it came to serve in the *Zhuangzi* context.

Although this archaeological evidence is fragmentary and speculative, it certainly does not rule out, and may even support, such a picture of how the *Zhuangzi* came together. This, I argue, is what the process of text formation would look like in the absence of a strong teaching tradition or disciple lineage. It explains many of the *Zhuangzi*’s features: its heterogeneity, its occasional internal contradictions, and even its overall greatness: after all, what we are looking at is an artificial selection process of sorts, and surely one of the selection criteria would have been *quality*, however that might be defined.

A final example which I believe may contribute to this general picture of *Zhuangzi* text formation involves “Discussing Swords.” Scholars since HAN Yu have doubted its authenticity (WANG 1988: 30.1215). GUAN Feng took up and advocated an earlier suggestion that the “Zhuangzi” who appears there was actually ZHUANG Xin 莊辛.<sup>57</sup> While it is easy to discount “Discussing Swords,” one should remember that it did “make the cut,” so to speak: it remained a part of the *Zhuangzi* anthology when

<sup>56</sup> See diagram at <https://ctext.org/static/dh/mozi-xunzi-zhuangzi.png>.

<sup>57</sup> He dismisses the single instance in the chapter where “Zhuangzi” refers to himself as “Zhou,” suggesting that it could easily be the result of later editorial intervention. The ruler in the chapter is King Wen of Zhao (趙文王, r. 298–266 BCE), not impossibly late for a contemporary of King Hui of Liang (as ZHUANG Zhou supposedly was), but a better match for King Xiang of Chu (楚襄王, r. 329–263 BCE) who in the *Zhan guo ce* 戰國策 (*Strategems of the Warring States*) was said to have given an audience to ZHUANG Xin. And according to GUAN, as well as earlier scholars, the style and thought of the chapter does not fit Zhuangzi or Daoism generally (GUAN Feng 1962: 85; see also LUO Genze 2001: 260). Roth (1991: 82) also follows this fairly plausible suggestion.

many other anecdotes did not.<sup>58</sup> Roman Graziani, one of the few scholars to analyse this chapter in detail, reveals it as a masterful attempt to solve the perennial problem of how to tell someone they are wrong without making them disastrously angry (Graziani 2012: 63–66; Graziani 2014). While admitting that the chapter “flies in the face of the [*Zhuangzi*’s] repeated injunctions in the work to protect oneself and remain aloof from the hell of politics,” Graziani relates it to the famous dialogue between Confucius and YAN Hui from “In the Human World” 人間世 (WANG 1988: 4.117–130) and argues that, in “Discussing Swords,” “*Zhuangzi* seems to tackle the kind of mission that YAN Hui had given himself” (Graziani 2014: 378). Graziani’s argument about the philosophical connection between the two chapters is persuasive, but that does not necessarily imply a textual connection—it does not imply, for example, that “Discussing Swords” was written with the *Zhuangzi* in mind or that it was originally intended to be a part of the anthology. Instead, the connection perceived by Graziani could serve as an explanation for how a “genetically” unrelated—but still wonderful—anecdote could have ended up being preserved in the *Zhuangzi*. The coincidence of name and partial coincidence of persuasive strategy, together with the high quality of the chapter’s writing and its slightly bizarre imagery, might have led to the incorporation into the *Zhuangzi* anthology of this pre-existing piece of prose—in much the same way (we might hypothesize) as the “Robber Zhi” piece might have ended up there.

## 4 Conclusion

Writing in the field of medieval European manuscript studies, Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen hypothesize that “the manuscript is a process as much as it is a product, resulting in absolute numerical uniqueness” (2015: 4). The complexity they observe in a medieval manuscript’s “life-cycle” is comparable to that of a biological organism, in that the process of individuation and development does not end with conception or birth but potentially continues throughout a manuscript’s existence. Many of their observations are applicable to the textual cultures of early China as well, and particularly for a text (perhaps one should say “a corpus”) like the *Zhuangzi*, whose most devoted readers and transmitters could hardly have been personally inclined toward rigid orthodoxy.

Much work remains to be done in support of the “*Zhuangzi* Anthology” hypothesis, both in terms of identifying and interpreting positive evidence, and addressing potential or long-standing objections. Due to considerations of scope, the present essay has been limited to a discussion of the Warring States, Qin, and very early Western Han textual culture. It presents only a small fraction of what could be said in support of the idea that the *Zhuangzi* is an anthology of somewhat uncertain

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<sup>58</sup>The fact that Guo Xiang apparently declined to comment on it suggests that its place in the anthology was fairly tenuous, however.

authorship. Perhaps the most important work ahead is to demonstrate that studying the *Zhuangzi* with this background theory of its authorship is just as productive—and even just as rewarding—as considering it as the work of just one man. There is every reason to believe that this work is both possible (indeed already ongoing) and potentially rewarding.

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# Chapter 3

## The Authorship of the *Zhuangzi*



Yuet Keung Lo

### 1 Introduction

Given our current knowledge of the nature of the composition, formation, compilation and textual history of the work titled *Zhuangzi* 莊子 as well as Warring States and Han-dynasty histories, it is practically impossible to ascertain the identity of its author(s). Traditionally, at least since the fourth century, the *Zhuangzi* as most people knew it probably consisted of thirty-three chapters, which were divided into three clusters of seven Inner Chapters 內篇 (chapters 1–7), fifteen Outer Chapters 外篇 (chapters 8–22), and eleven Mixed Chapters 雜篇 (chapters 23–33).<sup>1</sup> The major issue about the authorship of the text actually concerns only the Inner Chapters in the received *Zhuangzi* today, which scholars past and present generally believe came from the brush of ZHUANG Zhou 莊周 (tentatively, 365–290 BCE) [Ban 2002: 6.30.1730].<sup>2</sup> The reason is that since at least the Northern Song in the eleventh century, it has been a virtually universal consensus that the seven Inner Chapters exhibit a coherent structure unified with a complex and profound philosophy that supersedes that of the Outer and Mixed Chapters, as such no one but Master ZHUANG Zhou himself could possibly have produced them. Indeed, the Outer and Mixed Chapters are disparate units which are not correlated in narrative design and the philosophies they express are varied and perhaps incongruous with one another,

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<sup>1</sup>In this essay when the chapter divisions and their contents refer specifically to those in our received version of the *Zhuangzi*, they will be capitalized.

<sup>2</sup>The tentative dates for ZHUANG Zhou and other Warring States thinkers are given by Qian Mu. See Qian 2002: 696.

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and above all else, mostly inferior to that embedded in the Inner Chapters.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Outer and Mixed Chapters were and still are believed by many to have come from the (actual) disciples and followers of Master ZHUANG, or ZHUANGZI. While the authorships of the Outer and Mixed Chapters are deemed inconsequential if not settled, whether ZHUANGZI actually wrote the Inner Chapters remains controversial. In modern critical scholarship, there has been increasing skepticism about the time-hallowed belief in his authorship. Professor Esther Klein has recently re-examined virtually all the known evidence cited in support of the traditional view. Her analysis is refreshing as it evaluates the validity of the long-held claim primarily on the basis of historical and textual evidence, leaving aside the issues on the philosophy in the text.<sup>4</sup> Her critique is formidable and powerful, perhaps even unsettling to defenders of the traditional view. It now seems acutely evident that it is problematic to consider ZHUANG Zhou to be the author of the Inner Chapters unless more solid evidence can be provided. This chapter uncovers some new references and borrowings from the *Zhuangzi* and revisits some of the major but contentious textual evidence related to the existence of the Inner Chapters in Warring States and early Han times. It does not aim to argue that the Inner Chapters as a cluster in our received *Zhuangzi* necessarily existed in Warring States times; rather, it suggests that some of the cluster's constituents, either an entire chapter or independent sections, were then circulated. Moreover, this chapter briefly discusses the nature of text formation and the notion of authorship to complicate the difficulty of ascertaining the identity of the author of the Inner Chapters in the *Zhuangzi*.

## 2 Sorting Out the *Zhuangzi*, Again

As early as the “Bibliographic Treatise” (藝文志) of the *Han History* (*Hanshu* 漢書) composed by BAN Gu 班固 (32–92), the work titled *Zhuangzi* in fifty-two chapters (*pian* 篇) was attributed to a native of Song 宋 called ZHUANG Zhou (Ban 2002: 6.30.1730). In fact, the treatise was based on LIU Xiang's 劉向 (77 BCE–6 BCE) *Separate Catalogue* (*bielu* 別錄) and his son LIU Xin's 劉歆 (ca. 53 BCE–23 CE) *Seven Summaries* (*qilue* 七略) which was abstracted from it. The senior LIU was in charge of editing, compiling, and classifying the texts collected from the Han empire and kept in the imperial library. According to SIMA Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145 BCE–86 BCE) *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Archivist), which offered the earliest account of ZHUANG Zhou known to us today, the protagonist's “composed

<sup>3</sup>Modern scholars managed to classify in their own way the diverse philosophies into different groups. Liu Xiaogan divides them into three distinct groups: the “Transmitters,” “Huang-Lao School,” and the “Anarchists.” A.C. Graham, on the other hand, distinguishes them into “School of Zhuangzi,” the Syncretists,” the “Primitivists,” and the “Yangists.” See Liu 1995 and Graham 1981.

<sup>4</sup>Klein, 2011: 299–369. Klein does discuss XUNZI's criticism of *Zhuangzi*'s thought and argues that “it could easily have been formed without knowledge of anything in the inner chapters.” Klein 2011: 333–337. Her argument is untenable. See discussion below.

writings [amounted to] more than one hundred thousand words, which by and large consisted of allegorical words” (其著書十餘萬言, 大抵率寓言也) [Sima 1963: 63.2143]. It cannot be overemphasized that “*shu*” 書 in Warring States and Han times means “writings” in most contexts and occasionally, “book.” According to XU Shen’s 許慎 (58?–147?) 說文解字 (Explanations of Simple Graphs and Analyses of Composite Graphs), *shu* means “to put it down on either bamboo or silk” (箸於竹帛謂之書) [Duan 2000:754]. JIA Yi 賈誼 (200 BCE–168 BCE), SIMA Qian’s contemporary, also understood it the same way (Yan and Zhong 2000: 325). Thus, *shu* means to write or, as a noun, writing. In the case of ZHUANG Zhou, we are on safe ground to assume that SIMA Qian was referring to his writings, not a corpus because the archivist did not mention the title of the work, the number of chapters it contained, or even its internal structure or the lack thereof.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the writings in question did not seem to have a title. In his account of SHEN Buhai 申不害 (400 BCE–337 BCE) which he placed right after that of ZHUANG Zhou, SIMA Qian said that SHEN composed writings in two *pian*, titled *Shenzi* 申子 (Sima 1963: 7.63.2146). It seems clear that when the titles of writings or books were known to him, the archivist would have indicated it. In spite of all these unknowns, modern scholars almost unanimously identify it as the 52-chapter text registered under the name of ZHUANG Zhou decades later in the Han imperial library,<sup>6</sup> and they recognize ZHUANG Zhou as its author.

The most notable scholar in support of this view in pre-modern China is GUO Xiang 郭象 (d. 312), who was well known for creating a 33-chapter recension of the *Zhuangzi* mentioned above and wrote an influential commentary on it. Some scholars assume that GUO redacted out of the 52-chapter *Zhuangzi* that came from the Han imperial library, which, again, was assumed to be identical to SIMA Qian’s version.<sup>7</sup> According to them, since the new *Zhuangzi* as we have it today amounts to some sixty thousand words in length, GUO effectively expunged some forty thousand words. As such, each chapter then would be about some two thousand words long on average—or roughly, nineteen chapters in size—which is indeed the case with GUO’s recension of the *Zhuangzi*. However, this makes sense on the assumption that the Han imperial *Zhuangzi* was indeed the same text that SIMA Qian had read.<sup>8</sup> SIMA Qian noted that HAN Fei 韓非 (280 BCE–233 BCE) also composed

<sup>5</sup> Esther Klein has a perceptive discussion related to this point. See Klein 2011: 315–317.

<sup>6</sup> The widespread claim could be supported by one seldom-acknowledged fact that SIMA Qian’s copy of the *Zhuangzi* belonged to the state archive (the Stone Chamber and Golden Vault 石室金匱) where books and writings were stored; it was not a private copy. Thus, it is not impossible that it was the version that LIU Xiang would edit and compile decades later. See Sima 1963: 10.130.3296.

<sup>7</sup> Liu Xiaogan is probably the most vigorous advocate. See Liu 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Kern has a different explanation. He says: “the ‘more than one hundred thousand words’ that Sima Qian attributes to Zhuangzi may not have been all unique texts but, instead belong to a common corpus and whose coherence with one another may well have been found in their partial overlap.” See Kern 2015:101-4-5: 341. This is a perceptive yet speculative observation. It is known that LIU Xiang would remove what he deemed overlaps in various copies of writings attributed to the same “author.”

**Table 3.1** *Zhuangzi* texts, and *Zhuangzi* Commentaries mentioned in the *Jingdian shiwen* and the *Jin History* (*Jinshu* 晉書, completed in 648)

Han text with a title	Reader	Juan 卷	Pian	Inner	Outer	Mixed	Word count
<i>Zhuangzi</i> ?	SIMA Qian	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	>100,000
<i>Zhuangzi</i>	BAN Gu	Unknown	52	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
<i>Zhuangzi</i>	GAO You 高誘 (fl. early 3rd cent.)	Unknown	23/33/52 <sup>a</sup>	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Post Han Text	Commentator	<i>Juan</i>	<i>Pian</i>	Inner	Outer	Mixed	Word count
Commentary	CUI Zhuan 崔譔 (fl. early 3rd cent.)	10	27	7	20	No	Unknown
Commentary	XIANG Xiu 向秀 (ca. 227–272)	20	26/27/28	Yes	Yes	No	Unknown
Commentary	SIMA Biao (d. 306)	21	52	7	28	14	Unknown
Commentary	GUO Xiang (d. 312)	33	33	7	15	11	≈65,000
Commentary	LI Yi 李頤	30	30/35	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Commentary	MENG Shi 孟氏	18	52	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
<i>Jin History</i> <sup>b</sup>	FANG Xuanling 房玄齡 <i>et al.</i>		Dozens 莊周著內外 數十篇	Yes	Yes	No	Unknown

<sup>a</sup>In his commentary on the “Xiuwu xun” 修務訓 chapter of the *Huai’nanzi* 淮南子, GAO You said: “ZHUANG Zhou ‘composed a book in twenty-three pian to advocate Daoist ideas’ (作書廿三篇, 為道家之言). See Liu 1989: 654. However, in his commentary on the “Biji” 必己 chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, GAO also said that ZHUANG Zhou composed a work in fifty-two pian and titled it *Zhuangzi*. See Chen 2002: 839. In the second account, it appears that GAO was quoting from SIMA Qian’s account of ZHUANG Zhou. It is not clear why GAO seemed to contradict himself. It is possible that 廿三 (twenty-three) in the first account was the corrupted form of 五十二 (fifty-two). According to the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 edition of the *Huai’nanzi*, twenty-three is thirty-three 三十三 instead. It is possible that the change was made after Guo Xiang’s redaction became popular.

<sup>b</sup>Fang 1974: 5.49.1374

writings in more than one hundred thousand words, virtually the same amount as his *Zhuangzi* text. Since our received *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 contains fifty-five chapters—practically the same as the 52-chapter *Zhuangzi* in the Han imperial library, the speculation of modern scholars is not baseless. It must be emphasized that LU Deming 陸德明 (556–627), who still had access to the 52-chapter *Zhuangzi*, did not say that the Han imperial *Zhuangzi* was the base-text for GUO's recension, although he did specify it was indeed the text to which SIMA Biao 司馬彪 (d. 306) and a certain Mr. Meng 孟氏 each wrote a commentary.<sup>9</sup> This eyewitness testimony is more reliable than our speculation. In the Postface to his commentary on the 33-chapter *Zhuangzi*, GUO Xiang complained that “scholars of limited learning were not able to interpret ZHUANGZI's panoptic import and recklessly interpolated peculiar doctrines [into his work]” (一曲之士, 不能暢其弘旨, 而妄竄奇說). He also mentioned the names of three chapters (*pian* 篇) and two sections (*shou* 首) he purged, and added that “cunning and heterogeneous [portions] similar to these [chapters and sections] constitute three parts in ten” (凡諸巧雜, 若此之類, 十分有三) of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>10</sup> Although scholars unanimously believe that the excised chapters and sections came from the outer and mixed chapters, there is in reality no concrete proof at all except for the implicit assumption that the inner chapters were by default uniformly superior in quality. The inferior chapters could only have come from the non-inner chapters of GUO's base-text. The problem remains that we have no access to any of the *Zhuangzi* texts that were available to GUO Xiang and LU Deming. The actual contents of the inner, outer, and mixed chapters in them can only be assumed to be similar to our received *Zhuangzi*. In any case, GUO believed that the *Zhuangzi* text he worked with was adulterated and that the thirty-three chapters which survived his editorial scalpel came from ZHUANG Zhou himself. In his famous commentary, GUO treated them as a coherent body of texts with a unified philosophical system (Table 3.1).

<sup>9</sup> See Lu Deming, *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 (Textual Explanations of Classics), “Introduction” (*Xulu* 敘錄). LU said that SIMA Biao's *Zhuangzi* was divided into seven inner chapters, twenty-eight outer chapters, and fourteen mixed chapters but he did not reveal its word length. Thus, we still cannot confirm if the BAN Gu's *Zhuangzi* was more than one hundred thousand words.

<sup>10</sup> GUO Xiang's Postface survives only in a version of the *Zhuangzi* with his commentary that was preserved at Kōzanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan. It was cited by LU Deming in his “Introduction” to *Jingdian shiwen*, where he criticized people after ZHUANG Zhou who failed to appreciate his paradoxical style of writing and added extraneous materials to his work, thereby compromising its original integrity. LU then paraphrased from GUO's Postface as mentioned above. Esther Klein misreads LU's paraphrase and thinks it was GUO who criticized ZHUANG Zhou being “an eccentric genius who rushed crazily into peculiar theories” (一曲之才, 妄竄奇說; Klein's [incorrect] translation). As a result, ZHUANG Zhou himself produced the incongruous portions into his own text! See Klein 2011: 302–304. The three chapters (*pian*) GUO Xiang expunged are called “Weiyan” 尾[危]言, “Youfu” 游易[覺], and “Zixu” 子胥 and the two excised sections (*shou*) are identified as “Eyi” 闕亦[奕] and “Yixiu” 意循[修]. Structurally, Warring States texts were either composed of or divided into a number of sections (*zhang* 章) whose measure word, since Han times, was called *shou*. Conventionally, each section would be identified by its protagonist or some distinct feature. “Eyi” and “Yixiu” were such markers in GUO's reference. See Yu 2004: 421.

The base-text for GUO Xiang's recension is not known but he certainly had seen XIANG Xiu's 向秀 (227–272) wildly popular commentary on the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, he was even accused of plagiarizing it.<sup>12</sup> Since XIANG Xiu confessed that he wrote his commentary only in response to CUI Zhuan's 崔譔 (fl. early 3rd cent.), which, according to LU Deming, consisted of seven inner chapters and twenty outer chapters, so it is very likely that the internal structure of XIANG's version of the *Zhuangzi* was identical. In fact, LU testified that XIANG's *Zhuangzi* was divided into inner chapters and outer chapters (but no mixed chapters) and one of its three different versions in circulation was composed of twenty-seven chapters—the total number of chapters in CUI's *Zhuangzi*, which also contained only the inner and outer chapters. As GUO Xiang's recension had thirty-three chapters, it is obvious that he did not simply duplicate XIANG's *Zhuangzi*, but must have also consulted other versions of the *Zhuangzi* for his redaction.<sup>13</sup> Given that his hometown Luoyang 洛陽 was fewer than 10 km from SIMA Biao's Wen 溫, he could have had access to SIMA's 52-chapter *Zhuangzi*, which did include a division of Mixed Chapters.<sup>14</sup> We should recall that SIMA Biao's commentary was based on the Han imperial version of the *Zhuangzi*. This point seems to be particularly important because it shows that GUO Xiang might have extracted materials from the Han imperial *Zhuangzi* even though he did not necessarily adopt it as his base-text, as was the case with CUI Zhuan (see below). As for the internal structure of GUO's recension, it evidently did not follow XIANG Xiu's *Zhuangzi*, but it is not clear how and why GUO added the division of Mixed Chapters. While we cannot rule out that he simply adopted it from the Han imperial *Zhuangzi*, the problem remains that we are ignorant of its internal structure and the number of chapters in it.

Nevertheless, LU Deming emphasized that while all the versions of the *Zhuangzi* known to him contained the inner chapters, some had the outer chapters but not the mixed chapters (內篇眾家並同, 自餘或有外而無雜). This means the inner chapters and outer chapters as two distinct clusters were also present in all the versions but the mixed chapters as a cluster appeared only in some of them.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, in the most charitable sense, the inner chapters were identical in terms of the number and order of chapters, as well as their contents. Thus, all these versions

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of XIANG Xiu's philosophy in his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, see Lo 2015: 439–443.

<sup>12</sup> Xiang Xiu *Biezhuàn* 向秀別傳 cited in LIU Xiaobiao's 劉孝標 (465–521) commentary on *Shishuo xinyu* 4.17, Mather 1976: 100. See also Wang 2007: 113–130.

<sup>13</sup> None of the three versions of Xiang's *Zhuangzi* had thirty-three chapters.

<sup>14</sup> For much of his adult life, GUO Xiang wielded enormous power under the tutelage of Prince Donghai 東海王, as such, he could easily have obtained a copy of the 52-chapter *Zhuangzi* either from his contemporary SIMA Biao who was Director of the Palace Library, or anywhere else since it was available in his time.

<sup>15</sup> Feng Youlan's reading of the quotation is unique. He takes it to mean: "All versions had the inner chapters and outer chapters but some did not further divide the outer chapters into outer chapters and mixed chapters." This interpretive reading cannot be justified on syntactical ground. Feng does not think that the distribution of inner chapters and outer chapters varied with every version of the *Zhuangzi*. Feng 1984: 108.

contained seven inner chapters and their contents were identical except perhaps for minor textual variants, which LU noted in his annotations to each chapter. Otherwise, he would have pointed it out because the integrity of the inner chapters represented for him the unique genius of ZHUANGZI. In light of LU's valuable remark, we know that GUO Xiang's base-text contained at least the inner and outer chapters and perhaps the mixed chapters as well. However, even if his base-text did consist of all three divisions, it does not mean that it also had a total of thirty-three chapters—it might have more or less—and more importantly, the numbers of outer chapters and mixed chapters might also be different from what we have in GUO's recension, let alone their order in their respective division. In other words, GUO might have altered the contents of these two chapter divisions at least by transposing the chapters in them and changing their overall distribution while keeping the number of chapters intact.<sup>16</sup> Granted that GUO's redaction—it might be enlarged or abridged from its base-text—was guided by his interpretation of his *Zhuangzi* base-text, his criteria for grouping the thirty-three chapters into the three distinct divisions are not immediately clear if he indeed reclassified them. As LU Deming observed, when redacting their own version of *Zhuangzi*, “commentators excluded or included (portions) with their speculation” (注者以意去取);<sup>17</sup> GUO Xiang was no exception even though LU particularly favored his judgment and thought, because he was convinced that only Zixuan's (GUO's style-name) commentary was “singularly able to sympathize with ZHUANGZI's import” (唯子玄所注特會莊生之旨). Indeed, GUO explicitly claimed that he aimed at seeking out ZHUANGZI's intended meanings (求莊子之意) in his recension.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of his glosses and annotations of the entire *Zhuangzi*, whose base-text was GUO Xiang's 33-chapter recension, LU Deming appended a short postscript where he said that “ZHUANGZI emitted wonderful words like music in the seven [inner] chapters” (莊生振徽音於七篇) [Huang 2006: 831]. This confirms positively that many, if not all, versions of the *Zhuangzi* after the Han dynasty contained *seven identical* inner chapters and that they were believed to have come from ZHUANG Zhou's own hands. Thus, GUO Xiang by no means was the person who was responsible for creating the seven Inner Chapters as a distinct group of supposedly homogenous texts in the *Zhuangzi* and attributed them to ZHUANG Zhou. He merely followed an esteemed tradition. Most importantly, since SIMA Biao's 52-chapter *Zhuangzi* also had the seven inner chapters—a common division in all the versions examined by LU Deming, this means that the *Zhuangzi* text kept in the Han imperial library, too, contained them. Furthermore, it may be deduced that the

<sup>16</sup> Wang Shumin has made a similar argument and proposed that we ignore the distinction between the divisions of the inner, outer, and mixed chapters when we study the *Zhuangzi*. See Wang 2007: 17–22.

<sup>17</sup> Klein translates this line incorrectly as: “Thus the commentator included or excluded [things] based on the underlying meaning.” See Klein 2011: 304. Here, *yi* 意 refers to the commentator's subjective reading of the *Zhuangzi* text, not its “underlying meaning.” The line appears in LU Deming's “Introduction” to *Jingdian shiwen*. See Huang 2006: 28.

<sup>18</sup> GUO Xiang's Postface, reproduced in Yu 2004: 421.



imperial version would at least have a division called “outer chapters” in distinction to that for the inner chapters.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to LU Deming, we can confirm this logical deduction. In his annotations for the “Qiwulun” 齊物論 (Inner) chapter, on the section (*zhang* 章) beginning with the line “The Way has never known boundaries” (夫道未始有封), LU quoted CUI Zhuan as saying: “The “Qiwu[lun]” chapter contains seven sections, and this one connects to the previous section, yet BAN Gu said it belonged to the outer chapters” (崔云齊物七章，此連上章，而班固說在外篇) [Huang 2006: 741]. It should be pointed out that the chapter divisions of a text varied with the exegete and commentator in the commentarial tradition since the Han dynasty. While CUI divided the “Qiwulun” chapter into seven sections (*zhang* 章), it does not necessarily mean that it was also the case with SIMA Qian’s *Zhuangzi* or LIU Xiang’s imperial version, which presumably was the copy BAN Gu inherited.<sup>20</sup> LU’s comment may mean that BAN Gu had moved the section in question somewhere else in the “outer chapters” and added an explanatory note there.<sup>21</sup> If so, his version would be different from CUI Zhuan’s.<sup>22</sup>

Three facts are clear from LU’s valuable quotation. First, the “Qiwulun” chapter belonged to the inner chapters and CUI Zhuan’s comment showed that it was true of the Han imperial *Zhuangzi*. Second, CUI unequivocally stated that BAN Gu himself referred to the outer chapters in his *Zhuangzi* text, so it is evident that the Han imperial version of the *Zhuangzi* contained both the inner chapters and the outer chapters. Whether or not it also included a division called mixed chapters remains uncertain, however. Third, it is clear that even though CUI consulted the Han imperial version of the *Zhuangzi*, he did not always follow its specific arrangement and, perhaps, division of texts called sections. It is reasonable to expect that GUO Xiang would do the same with his redaction. We do not know exactly into how many sections GUO divided each of the Inner Chapters but they might well be different from BAN Gu’s divisions. The critical point here is that the contents of the Inner Chapters in GUO’s recension may not be identical with the corresponding division in the Han imperial version. In this sense, the attempt, based on GUO Xiang’s recension, to track down quotations from the Inner Chapters in texts from Warring States and Han

<sup>19</sup> LU Deming said: “Inner is a designation set up in contrast to outer” (內者，對外立名). See Huang 2006: 733.

<sup>20</sup> In extant Warring States texts, none was divided into inner and outer sections (see below). Some scholars proposed that the Huai’nan court in early Han was responsible for putting disparate *Zhuangzi* materials into a corpus, thus should be credited for the division of inner chapters and outer chapters.

<sup>21</sup> BAN Gu might not have agreed with LIU Xiang’s division of sections in the “Qiwulun” or any other chapter of the *Zhuangzi* for that matter, but this does not necessarily mean he would revise LIU’s version. In fact, the remark cited by CUI Zhuan suggests that he did not. BAN Gu himself wrote a commentary to the *Zhuangzi* which LU Deming quoted three times in his *Jingdian shiwen*. Apparently, CUI also cited from BAN’s commentary. BAN Gu also composed an essay called “Nan Zhuang lun” 難莊論 (“Interrogating Zhuangzi”), which only exists in fragments today.

<sup>22</sup> The line may possibly mean that BAN Gu made a note to the section in question to indicate that it should belong to the “outer chapters.” In other words, he did not actually transpose the section to the “outer chapters.” However, this reading seems less likely.



times would be of limited use in order to identify whether they already existed then. Any conclusion drawn should be regarded as tentative. We need to remain humble and cautious.

Nevertheless, scholars have made many such attempts and a significant number of quotations and paraphrases identical, similar, and alluding to passages in GUO's recension were meticulously and laboriously culled from literature from the Warring States period to the time of SIMA's Qian's *Shiji*. They aim to prove that if the Inner Chapters existed in the Warring States period, they could be authored by ZHUANG Zhou; indeed, no one else could possibly have written something so profound and marvelous—a typical view expressly stated by GUO Xiang and LU Deming.<sup>23</sup> Professor Klein has recently reexamined many of these textual parallels rigorously and concluded that it is not certain that they actually came from the Inner Chapters as we now have them. While her analysis of some of the parallels may be debatable, the overall scenario she paints presents a daunting challenge for defenders of ZHUANG Zhou's authorship of the Inner Chapters. Still, if my investigation above is valid, the approach to establish ZHUANG Zhou's authorship itself is fundamentally flawed. If the Inner Chapters actually existed in Warring States times, the totality of their contents would very likely be different from those in GUO Xiang's Inner Chapters, though overlaps might exist. Even if we could unearth Warring States texts with passages identical or similar to contents in GUO's Inner Chapters (see discussion below), we may only get a bit closer to make a case for the existence of the Inner Chapters attributable to ZHUANG Zhou. It would not be a definitive conclusion by any means. Strictly speaking, however, whether we could solidly identify ZHUANG Zhou as the author in our conventional sense is another kind of inquiry that needs much stronger evidence that is verifiable.

### 3 Old Sources Revisited

In SIMA Qian's account of ZHUANG Zhou, he said: "ZHUANG Zhou wrote the "Yufu," "Dao Zhi," and "Quqie" in order to rebuke the followers of Confucius and elaborate the art of LAOZI. Mountains of Zigzag ("Weilei xu") and Kangsangzi and such were all empty words without factual substance" (作漁父、盜跖、胠篋，以詆訛孔子之徒，以明老子之術。畏累虛、亢桑子之屬，皆空語無事實). "Yufu" and "Dao Zhi" are the titles of two chapters which belong to the Mixed Chapters and the "Quqie" is another which belongs to the Outer Chapters in GUO Xiang's recension; thematically, all three chapters served a common goal to admonish people who sought to uphold humaneness, rightness, and the rites at the expense of losing their true nature. The archivist did not name them in random. Interestingly, he listed them in backward order vis-à-vis our received version but it is not clear if this has any

<sup>23</sup> GUO's view was also expressed in his Preface to his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. See Guo 1985: 3.

implication for chapter division in his *Zhuangzi* text. Scholars almost unanimously believe that “Weilei xu” and “Kangsangzi” were also chapter titles but the consensus is questionable.<sup>24</sup> (Mixed) Chapter 23 is titled “Gengsang chu” 庚桑楚 where Gengsang is the family name and Chu is the personal name. On the other hand, Kangsangzi means Master Kangsang; though it should refer to Gengsang Chu but the actual appellation is not the same. While the two forms of address could be interchangeable in general usage, they were not for a chapter title as it was a proper name. Nevertheless, the mention of Kangsangzi proved that SIMA Qian probably had read the “Gengsang chu” chapter as the figure appears only in this chapter in our received *Zhuangzi*. As for “Weilei xu,” there is no such title in GUO’s *Zhuangzi*,<sup>25</sup> but in the “Gengsang chu” chapter, we are told that Gengsang Chu went to live on the Mountains of Zigzag (*weilei* 畏壘, variant of 累) [Guo 1985: 769; Watson 1968: 246].<sup>26</sup> Both the hermit sage and the mountains were fictitious and this was a simple fact that SIMA Qian wanted to point out about the creative art of the *Zhuangzi* text he read. The expression “*zhi shu*” (之屬, [things] of similar kind) here refers to numerous other fictitious characters or places in the *Zhuangzi* similar to Kangsangzi and Mountains of Zigzag; syntactically, it does not refer to the three chapters mentioned earlier.<sup>27</sup> Rather, it was meant to characterize the entire text of *Zhuangzi*. After all, SIMA Qian already declared that the *Zhuangzi* was a bundle of writings consisting mostly of “allegorical words;” the misreading of the expression would render his remark superfluous.

It is worth noting that in the “Yuyan” 寓言 (Mixed) chapter, the author says that nine tenths of the *Zhuangzi* consisted of “imputed words” 寓言 (Guo 1985: 947; Watson 1968: 303). Since the term *yuyan* never appeared in any other extant texts before the Han, it seems evident that SIMA Qian actually borrowed it from the Mixed Chapter.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the “Yuyan” chapter must have been part of his copy of *Zhuangzi*.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the term also appears in the “Tianxia” 天下 (Mixed)

<sup>24</sup> Esther Klein is an exception; she thinks it is best to understand the phrase “Weilei xu Kangsangzi zhishu” as “Master Gengsang of Weilei” rather than as two distinct chapters. Klein 2011: 318–319, n.53. However, this reading (provenance + Master X) is awkward and against the practice of naming in early Chinese literature.

<sup>25</sup> SIMA Zhen 司馬貞 (679–732) claimed that “Weilei xu” was indeed a chapter title and he said Weilei was the name of LAO Dan’s 老聃 disciple. No evidence was given. We do not know if SIMA Zhen had actually witnessed a *Zhuangzi* text that contained such a chapter. See Sima 1963: 7.63.2144.

<sup>26</sup> “Weilei xu” actually signifies a section where the fictitious place appears in the “Gengsang chu” chapter; this is exactly the same way GUO Xiang referred to the two sections he excised in his *Zhuangzi* texts.

<sup>27</sup> SIMA Zhen took “Kangsangzi” to mean the “Gengsang chu” chapter and claimed that the fictitious nature pertained to all the chapters thereafter. His view is not tenable as the name does not appear anywhere else in our received *Zhuangzi*. See Sima 1963: 7.63.2144.

<sup>28</sup> The term *yuyan* appears in one of the slips in the Fuyang excavated *Zhuangzi* (see below), which apparently belonged to the “Tianxia” (Mixed) chapter in our received version. See Hu 2013: 195.

<sup>29</sup> It is certain that LIU Xiang’s version of the *Zhuangzi* contained the “Yuyan” chapter as he himself mentioned it in his *Bielu*. However, it is not clear where it belonged in the corpus. Quoted by SIMA

chapter where it says: “he [ZHUANG Zhou] used ‘goblet words’ to pour out endless changes, ‘repeated words’ to give a ring of truth, and ‘imputed words’ to impart greater breadth. He came and went *alone* (emphasis added) with the pure spirit of Heaven and earth, yet he did not view the ten thousand things with arrogant eyes” (以卮言為曼衍，以重言為真，以寓言為廣。獨與天地精神往來，而不敖倪於萬物) [Guo 1985: 1098–1099; Watson 1968: 373]. Although we do not know for certain if the archivist also perused this chapter, his characterization of ZHUANG Zhou’s style of writing and personality suggests that he did. He said ZHUANG Zhou’s “words were boundless like an ocean; he abandoned himself to feel at ease. Thus, no king, duke, or people in high position could make use of him” (其言洸洋自恣以適己，故自王公大人不能器之) [Sima 1963: 7.63.2144]. “Boundless words like an ocean” essentially resemble “goblets words” that “pour out endless changes” and ZHUANG Zhou’s words, of course, are allegorical.<sup>30</sup> ZHUANG Zhou’s style of writing embodied his personality which emphasized intrinsic worth and self-expression that was captured in the single word “alone” (獨) in the “Tianxia” chapter.

After the previous description, SIMA Qian immediately went on to include a short tale made up of two episodes from the “Qiu shui” 秋水 (Outer) chapter and “Lie Yukou” 列御寇 (Mixed) chapter in our received version<sup>31</sup> to illustrate ZHUANG Zhou’s apparent aversion to politics and his lofty character, which was impervious to material gain and social status. No doubt, the anecdote was meant to illustrate his personality described previously. In sum, we know that the Grand Archivist’s *Zhuangzi* contained five mixed chapters and one outer chapter that correspond to GUO’s recension. Indeed, if we comb the *Shiji* more critically, we can identify some more similar citations or borrowings from the *Zhuangzi*. Professor Klein discusses

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Zhen; see Sima 1963: 7.63.2144.

<sup>30</sup> There was another reason why SIMA Qian made a special effort to describe ZHUANG Zhou’s style of writing; he wanted to emphasize the unique writing style of ZHUANG Zhou, which also reflected his unconventional character. In fact, ZHUANG Zhou was the only philosopher whose writing style received such treatment in the *Shiji*. The archivist noted elsewhere in the *Shiji* that “oftentimes XUNZI, MENGZI, GONGXUAN Gu, HAN Fei and their ilk each selected passages from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* to compose their own writings” (荀卿、孟子、公孫固、韓非之徒，各往往摭摭春秋之文以著書). See Sima 1963: 1.14.510.

<sup>31</sup> It is not inconceivable that the two stories from the two separate chapters might have come from one single chapter in the archivist’s version. Interestingly, SIMA Qian was not the first writer to conflate the two episodes into one tale. In a lost fragment quoted in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 in the tenth century, HAN Ying 韓嬰 (ca. 200 BCE–130 BCE) apparently incorporated the same two *Zhuangzi* stories the archivist quoted and one of ZHUANGZI’s utterances into one anecdote of his own about ZHUANG Zhou. See Li 1985: 3.474.2176. The utterance is, in fact, a lost fragment of the *Zhuangzi*, which fortunately was also quoted in the “Taizu xun” 秦族訓 chapter of the *Huai’nanzi* (Liu 1989: 685) and by ZHONGCHANG Tong 仲長統 (180–220) and MA Rong 馬融 (79–166) [Fan 1974: 7.60A.1953]. Moreover, it was identified as such by LI Xian 李賢 (654–684) [Fan 1974: 6.49.1658]. HAN Ying’s anecdote read seamlessly as a whole, and there is simply no way to tell if it was not originally one homogeneous story rather than a composite one.

several from the non-Inner Chapters but they are not exhaustive<sup>32</sup>. The following is one more example and there are others.<sup>33</sup>

In the “Chronological Table of Twelve Feudal Vassals” 十二諸侯年表, SIMA Qian said: “Thus Confucius expounded the kingly way, sought audience with more than seventy lords, yet none employed him” (是以孔子明王道, 干七十餘君, 莫能用) [Sima 1963: 2.13.509]. Compare this with the passage in the “Tianyun” 天運 (Outer) chapter where Confucius was quoted as saying to LAO Dan 老聃: “But I have been around to seventy-two different rulers with them, expounding the ways of the former kings and making clear the path trod by the dukes of Chou and Shao, and yet not a single ruler has found anything to excite his interest” (以奸者七十二君, 論先王之道而明周召之跡, 一君無所鉤用) [Guo 1985: 14.531; Watson 1968: 165–166]. It is sufficiently clear that the Grand Archivist quoted from the *Zhuangzi*. Indeed, he quoted it again in the “Arrayed Traditions of Scholars of Classics” 儒林列傳 (Sima 10.121.3115). Moreover, in all Warring States texts extant today,<sup>34</sup> the claim that Confucius had tried to seek audience with seventy some lords of state was unique to the *Zhuangzi*, nowhere else can it be found. As early as the first century, WANG Chong 王充 (27–97) already questioned its veracity. He said: “According to the *Analects* and the works of the various Masters [in the Warring States], Confucius returned to the state of Lu from Wei... (on this long trip) he could not have gone to [even] ten states. The lore about seventy states is not true” (案論語之篇, 諸子之書, 孔子自衛反魯, ..... 至不能十國。傳言七十國, 非其實也).<sup>35</sup> To be sure, WANG did not specify the source of the legend, but it is possible that he refuted it precisely because he knew it came from a non-historical work such as the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, being a critical thinker as he was, he did not quote from the text even once in his own sizeable work. Scholars in pre-twentieth-century China also argued that *Zhuangzi*’s claim was actually fiction because it was not possible for Confucius to have met so many rulers.<sup>36</sup>

As for the Inner Chapters, SIMA Qian might have even quoted directly from them. In the “Arrayed Traditions of Boyi and Shuyi” 伯夷叔齊列傳, he quoted a popular legend: “People who spread the lore say that Yao abdicated All under Heaven to XU You but XU You did not accept and, feeling insulted, fled into reclusion” (說者曰堯讓天下於許由, 許由不受, 恥之逃隱) [Sima 1963: 7.61.2121].

<sup>32</sup> See Klein 2011: 327–333. Since they do not affect the conclusion that the Inner Chapters were not alluded to or quoted in the *Shiji*, I will not discuss them here.

<sup>33</sup> Stephan Peter Bumbacher, for instance, mentions one explicit and one implicit quotation of the *Zhuangzi*, not mentioned in this chapter. See Bumbacher 2016: 640.

<sup>34</sup> In the “Taizu xun” chapter of the *Huai’nanzi*, it reads: “Confucius wished to implement the kingly way, but he went to persuade seventy [rulers] in the four quarters and found no one interested” (孔子欲行王道, 東西南北七十說而無所偶). See Liu 1989: 683.

<sup>35</sup> Huang 1990: 366–367. WANG Chong refuted this claim emphatically on different ground. He repeated his rebuttal four times in the same chapter.

<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above, SIMA Qian repeated the same claim in the “Arrayed Traditions of Scholars on the Classics” and SIMA Zhen commented on the line in question, saying, “the scribe at a later time made a mistake in recording” (後之記者失辭). See Sima 1963: 10.121.3115.

Here, the term “*shuo*zhe” (說者) does not mean “*shui*zhe” [the persuader(s)] as Klein has translated it (Klein 2011: 329); rather, it literally denotes the people who circulated the word around. It was indeed a common expression during the Warring States and XUNZI 荀子 (340 BCE–245 BCE) referred to these word-peddlers in a more precise expression called “*shisu zhi weishuo zhe*” 世俗之為說者 (lore peddlers of [our time]) [Wang 1997: 321–338]. In reality, SIMA Qian was scrutinizing a widespread legend from earlier times; he was not quoting some “persuaders.” The line 堯讓天下於許由 appears verbatim in the “Xiaoyao you” 逍遙遊 (Inner) chapter, yet in the *Zhuangzi*, Xu You did not feel ashamed by the offer, so it does not seem that the archivist actually quoted from the text if exact accuracy in details is demanded. However, for his purpose, SIMA Qian was not so much interested in XU You’s response than the veracity of the legend. Viewed in this light, it is not entirely impossible that he cited from the “Xiaoyao you” chapter. However, as Klein points out, the episode about Yao’s abdication appears in the “Dao Zhi” 盜跖 (Mixed) chapter where two other similar fleeing recluses were also mentioned, and the three of them were named in the same order as they appeared in the “Arrayed Traditions of Boyi and Shuyi” (Klein 2011: 328–329).<sup>37</sup> Hence, the chances for this chapter to be SIMA Qian’s source was at least as good as, if not better than, the “Xiaoyao you.” Of course, there is no reason why he could not have consulted both chapters, but this logical possibility does not prove conclusively the actual existence of the “Xiaoyao you” chapter in his *Zhuangzi*.

Even if the Inner Chapters were not alluded to or cited in the *Shiji*, it does not mean that they did not exist in SIMA Qian’s *Zhuangzi*. As an essentially non-historical work, the *Zhuangzi* was not a particularly useful source for the Grand Archivist when he composed his magnum opus.<sup>38</sup> Yet, numerous episodes in the *Zhuangzi* were direct references to historical events or popular legends of various degrees of veracity, and they were scattered through the entire corpus including the Inner Chapters as we know it today. No doubt, many anecdotes were utterly fictitious as SIMA Qian himself noted in his account of ZHUANG Zhou. In the handful of *Zhuangzi* passages identified in the *Shiji*, all but three were quoted for their value as “historical fact.”<sup>39</sup> Whether or not they are actually reliable is, of course, another matter. In the “Arrayed Traditions of Responsible Officials” 循吏列傳, SIMA Qian detailed the career of Sunshu Ao 孫叔敖 (ca. 630 BCE–ca. 593 BCE) and commented that he “became premier thrice without feeling joyful because he knew his talents helped

<sup>37</sup> Klein does not mention the “Xiaoyao you” as a possible source. In fact, she notes that “when Sima Qian writes about the *Zhuangzi* in the *Shiji*, the inner chapters do not figure at all. Nor are there any textual parallels between the *Shiji* and those inner chapters.” See Klein 2011: 331. Her conclusion is debatable. See below.

<sup>38</sup> SIMA Qian explicitly stated that he consulted the works of the “Hundred Schools” 百家言 but would not use them if he did not find them reliable. See Sima 1963: 1.1.46.

<sup>39</sup> Klein has a table that lists the “*Shiji* parallels with the *Zhuangzi*” and she includes the chapter titles. See Klein 2011: 332–333. But as I argue above, “Kangsangzi” was not a chapter title. On the other hand, there are a few other passages that she fails to identify. See discussion below. One example (from the “Qujie” chapter) of quotations for non-historical value is found on Klein’s list (the first one).

him get the position of its own accord; he lost the office thrice without feeling regretful because he knew it was not his fault” (三得相而不喜，知其材自得之也；三去相而不悔，知非己之罪也) [Sima 1963: 10.119.3100]. In the historical account of Sunshu Ao recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals), he was not described as such. It is, of course, possible that SIMA Qian based his account on another reliable source that is no longer available today, but until this can be ascertained, it is safe to believe that this particular trajectory of Sunshu Ao's official career was probably borrowed from the “Tian Zifang” 田子方 (Outer) chapter of *Zhuangzi* where it reads:

Jian Wu said to Sunshu Ao, “Three times you have become premier, yet you didn't seem to glory in it. Three times you were dismissed from the post, but you never looked glum over it. At first I doubted that this was really true, but now I stand before your very nose and see how calm and unconcerned you are. Do you have some unique way of using your mind?”

Sunshu Ao replied, “How am I any better than other men? I considered that the coming of such an honor could not be fended off, and that its departure could not be prevented. As far as I was concerned, the question of profit or loss did not rest with me, and so I had no reason to put on a glum expression, that was all. How am I any better than other men? Moreover, I'm not really certain whether the glory resides in the premiership or in me. If it resides in the premiership, then it means nothing to me. And if it resides in me, then it means nothing to the premiership. Now I'm about to go for an idle stroll, to go gawking in the four directions. What leisure do I have to worry about who holds an eminent position and who a humble one?”

Confucius, hearing of the incident, said: “He was a True Man of old, the kind that the wise cannot argue with, the beautiful cannot seduce, the violent cannot intimidate; even Fu Xi or the Yellow Emperor could not have befriended him. Life and death are great affairs, and yet they are no change to him—how much less to him are things like titles and stipends! With such a man, his spirit may soar over Mount Tai without hindrance, may plunge into the deepest springs without getting wet, may occupy the meanest, most humble position without distress. He fills all Heaven and earth; and the more he gives to others, the more he has for himself.”

肩吾問於孫叔敖曰子三為令尹而不榮華，三去之而無憂色。吾始也疑子，今視子之鼻間栩栩然，子之用心獨奈何？孫叔敖曰吾何以過人哉！吾以其來不可卻也，其去不可止也，吾以為得失之非我也，而無憂色而已矣。我何以過人哉！且不知其在彼乎，其在我乎？其在彼邪，亡乎我；在我邪，亡乎彼。方將躊躇，方將四顧，何暇至乎人貴人賤哉！

仲尼聞之曰古之真人，知者不得說，美人不得濫，盜人不得劫，伏戲、黃帝不得友。死生亦大矣，而無變乎己，況爵祿乎！若然者，其神經乎大山而無介，入乎淵泉而不濡，處卑細而不憊，充滿天地，既以與人，己愈有 (Guo 1985: 21.726; Watson 1968: 231–232; romanization converted to *pinyin*).

Obviously, the emphasis of the passage lies in the details of Sunshu Ao's self-cultivation and spiritual accomplishments. In his account, however, SIMA Qian made no mention of Sunshu's art of self-cultivation; he was only interested in the rise and fall of his official career as a historical fact. Based on the textual parallels between the two texts so far identified in current scholarship, this should speak for the general motivation by which the archivist borrowed from the *Zhuangzi* in the *Shiji*. Thus, it makes sense not to find as many quotations from the Inner Chapters as the rest of



the *Zhuangzi* because they are mostly creative stories with philosophical import whose many protagonists were fictional characters, historical personages turned allegorical personae, mythical figures, people with deformities, non-human creatures, crooked trees, and such.<sup>40</sup>

There is a similar passage about Sunshu Ao in the *Lüshi chunqiu*. It reads:

Intelligent scholar-knights fully understand the distinction between life and death and, having this understanding, cannot be confounded as to the difference between profit and harm or survival and ruin. Hence, Master Yan Ying made a covenant with Cui Zhu without altering his sense of propriety. As for Jizi of Yanling, the people of Wu hoped to make him king, but he was unwilling to accept. Sunshu Ao thrice held the office of prime minister but felt no joy because of it, and thrice left the office and felt no regret. All of these men had full understanding, and so things could not confound them.”

達士者，達乎死生之分。達乎死生之分，則利害存亡弗能惑矣。故晏子與崔杼盟而不變其義；延陵季子，吳人願以為王而不肯用，孫叔敖三為令尹而不喜，三去令尹而不憂；皆有所達也 (Chen 2002: 12.1354; Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 518).

In the extant literature from the Warring States, the story of Sunshu Ao was only recorded in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Lüshi chunqiu*, so one may argue that SIMA Qian might well have quoted from this source instead. Yet, apart from Sunshu Ao, the three other examples of intelligent scholar-knights in the *Lüshi chunqiu* passage were all borrowed from earlier sources, thus it makes no sense that the story of Sunshu Ao alone was original.

Still, there is one more twist to the *Zhuangzi* story of Sunshu Ao. As was the dramatization of Confucius’s attempts to persuade more than seventy lords, this story was in all likelihood fictionalized as well. Both are examples of “repeated words” (重言), which constituted seven tenths of the *Zhuangzi* (Guo 1985: 947; Watson 1968: 303). In *Analects* 5.19, it says:

Zizhang asked, “Ling Yin (prime minister) Ziwen gave no appearance of pleasure when he was made prime minister three times. Neither did he give any appearance of displeasure when he was removed from office three times. He always told his successor what he had done during his term of office. What do you think of this?”

The Master said, “He can, indeed, be said to be a man who does his best.”

“Can he be said to be benevolent?”

“He cannot even be said to be wise. How can he be said to be benevolent?”

子張問曰：令尹子文三仕為令尹，無喜色；三已之，無愠色。舊令尹之政，必以告新令尹。何如？子曰：忠矣。曰：仁矣乎？曰：未知，焉得仁？ (Lau 1979: 79; romanization converted to pinyin)

Prime Minister Ziwen (fl. 664 BCE–637 BCE) lived about one generation before Sunshu Ao and his political career was confirmed history. As such, he could be the inspiration for the portrayal of Sunshu Ao in the *Zhuangzi*, and not the other way

<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, if we look at the citations of the *Zhuangzi* in Chinese Buddhist writings, the majority came from the Inner Chapters, only passages with explicit philosophical import from the Outer and Mixed chapters would be quoted. In contrast, anecdotes were cited in the *Shiji* for “historical” value instead.

around. Like Ziwen, Sunshu Ao was also only being himself and doing his best (*zhong* 忠) but he was reincarnated into the Daoist paragon of self-sufficiency in *Zhuangzi*'s account, invulnerable to external circumstances, temptations, threats as well as changes, and won the approval of Confucius just as Ziwen did for being true to himself. The fictionalization of Sunshu Ao's political career and his character is consistent with the imaginative treatment of other historical figures in the *Zhuangzi* whereas the reference to Sunshu Ao in the *Lüshi chunqiu* evidently looks like a convenient loan from somewhere, if not necessarily the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>41</sup>

If the Inner chapters were not so useful to the archivist as historical sources, it would seem that they would be when he introduced ZHUANG Zhou's philosophy. However, in writing his accounts of people we would identify as philosophers, SIMA Qian was typically not keen on spelling out the details or even outlines of a philosopher's doctrines,<sup>42</sup> and what is considered most important to a given philosopher qua philosopher did not seem to get the same attention as his impact on politics and culture. For instance, in his accounts of MENGZI and XUNZI, their theories of human nature were not mentioned at all.<sup>43</sup> In fact, their philosophies were virtually ignored in favor of their peripatetic activities and political careers. There is no reason to expect to see quotations from the *Zhuangzi* on ZHUANG Zhou's philosophy in his biography, virtually none can be found, for example, in those of MENCIUS, XUNZI, and LAOZI either, though they were quoted elsewhere in the *Shiji*.<sup>44</sup> ZOU Yan 騶衍<sup>45</sup> and HAN Fei were the only two exceptions but the latter's essay on persuasion ("Shui nan" 說難) quoted in its entirety in his biography (but with some significant differences from our received text), strictly speaking, cannot be considered the central tenet of his legalist philosophy (Sima 1963: 7.63.2148–2154).

In this connection, it should be noted that the reason why SIMA Qian would single out the three non-Inner Chapters in introducing ZHUANG Zhou's philosophy

<sup>41</sup>There is at least another example of modifying a historical figure in the *Analects* in the Inner Chapters. Compare the characterization of Madman Jieyu 楚狂接輿 in the "Renjianshi" 人間世 chapter in the *Zhuangzi* and *Analects* 18.5. Jieyu also appears in the "Xiaoyao you" and "Yingdiwang" 應帝王 (Inner) chapters. It might not be coincidental that Jieyu did not figure in the Outer and Mixed Chapters.

<sup>42</sup>For example, in his biography of SHEN Buhai 申不害, which consists of sixty-eight words, SIMA Qian summarized Master SHEN's philosophy in mere eight words: "rooted in [the teachings of] the Yellow Emperor and LAOZI and advocated the doctrine of norms and names" (本於黃老而主刑名). See Sima 1963: 7.63.2146. Most of the other philosophers did not even receive such atypical treatment, as did SHEN Buhai. In an attempt to identify SIMA Qian's models of authorship, Martin Kern argues that the archivist depicted the Warring States "Masters" differently in order to represent the production of their texts in different ways. See Kern 2015.

<sup>43</sup>When LIU Xiang wrote his biography of XUNZI as his Preface to the philosopher's works, which he edited into a corpus that we have today, he specifically contrasted XUNZI's view that human nature is bad with that of MENGZI who argued that human nature is innately good. See Wang 1997: 558.

<sup>44</sup>For quotations of the *Xunzi* and *Laozi* (from chs 31, 38, 57, 80), see, for instance, Sima 1963: 4.23.1161–1163 [Wang 1997: 346–349]; 4.23.1164–1166 [Wang 1997: 281–284]; 9.105.2817, 10.122.3131; 10.129.3253.

<sup>45</sup>A synopsis of ZOU Yan's Yin-Yang philosophy was provided in Sima 1963: 7.74.2344.



appears to be twofold. Doctrinally, they converged on the common point that Confucian teachings would compromise people's "true nature" (variously called *zhen* 真 in the "Dao Zhi" and "Yufu", and *de* 德 and *xing* 性 in the "Quqie") [Guo 1985: 1000; 1025, 1031; 353, 359]. Artistically, the philosopher expressed his sarcastic criticisms of the followers of Confucius by using the personae of a fictitious fisherman and immoral thieves (exaggerated in the notorious character of murderous Robber Zhi who ridiculed Confucius as "Robber Qiu" 盜丘 [Qiu was Confucius's personal name] in the "Dao Zhi" chapter). We should not overlook SIMA Qian's remarks that came right after his concise assessment of ZHUANG Zhou's philosophy. He said: "[ZHUANG Zhou] was good at composition and writing. He could point to one thing to analogize something else in order to attack scholars of classics and rites as well as the Mohists" (善屬書離辭, 指事類情, 用剝剝儒墨) [Sima 1963: 7.63.2144].<sup>46</sup> Clearly, he wanted to emphasize ZHUANG Zhou's extraordinary art of disputation, which, according to him at least, was unique among Warring States philosophers.<sup>47</sup> There are no such examples of artistic criticism of the followers of Confucius in the received Inner Chapters,<sup>48</sup> or any other chapters in the *Zhuangzi* text for that matter. Furthermore, the image of Confucius himself in the Inner Chapters is mostly positive either as a Daoist sage or at least a humble and receptive learner of the Daoist Way.

Given SIMA Qian's purpose in constructing his account of ZHUANG Zhou, it makes perfect sense that he did not refer to the Inner Chapters in the *Shiji*. As a historian, he wanted to trace the beginning of the rivalry between the followers of Confucius and the students of LAOZI (ZHUANG Zhou being an influential example) that prevailed in his own time. At the end of his account of LAOZI, he noted: "In our time, people who learned the teaching of LAOZI dismissed Confucian learning while students of Confucian learning dismissed the teaching of LAOZI" (世之學老子者則絀儒學, 儒學亦絀老子) [Sima 1963: 7.63.2143].<sup>49</sup> The way the account of ZHUANG

<sup>46</sup> Klein translates the latter half of the line as: "He could point to the category and disposition of matters." It is incorrect. See Klein 2011: 319.

<sup>47</sup> ZHUANG Zhou's spectacular skill of disputation was also highlighted in the "Tianxia" 天下 chapter of *Zhuangzi*. See Guo 1985: 1098–1099; Watson 1968: 373–374.

<sup>48</sup> Yan Hui and Zigong were two of the most celebrated disciples in the *Analecets* and they were not criticized in the Inner Chapters. Yan Hui was mentioned in the "Renjianshi" and "Dazongshi" chapter as a receptive student who became an accomplished Daoist. Zigong appears only in the "Dazongshi" chapter; he failed to understand how a true Daoist observed mourning but was willing to learn like Yan Hui. He was not chastised in the chapter.

<sup>49</sup> Klein acknowledges that the three non-Inner Chapters "are indeed to varying degrees critical of Confucian ideas," but she thinks "it still leaves open the question of why SIMA Qian would choose to emphasize this particular theme in the *Zhuangzi* text unless he considered it to be a representative one." She misses the archivist's point because she is intent on looking for *ideas* representative of *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy particularly in the Inner Chapters. See Klein 2011: 321.

Zhou was constructed should not be considered as evidence for the absence of the Inner Chapters in SIMA Qian's copy of the *Zhuangzi*.

#### 4 Inner Chapters in the *Shiji*

The vast majority of modern scholars do not find explicit reference to prove the existence of the Inner Chapters in the *Shiji* while those who think otherwise fail to offer solid evidence to defend their case. Having reviewed several similar passages in the *Shiji* and the *Zhuangzi*, Esther Klein concludes that “when SIMA Qian writes about the *Zhuangzi* in the *Shiji*, the inner chapters do not figure at all” (Klein 2011: 327–331). Nevertheless, even if we dismiss the possible reference to the “Xiaoyao you” chapter in SIMA Qian's mention of Yao's abdication to XU You, there may still be hope in one more snippet of text which is identical to two short lines in the “Dazongshi” 大宗師—the sixth (Inner) chapter of our received *Zhuangzi*. In it, we are informed that the “True Man of ancient times” (古之真人) “could climb the high places and not be frightened, could enter the water and not get wet, could enter the fire and not get burned. His knowledge was able to climb all the way up to the Way like this” (登高不慄, 入水不濡, 入火不熱。是知之能登假於道也若此) [Guo 1985: 6.226; Watson 1968: 77]. The concept of “True Man” (*zhenren* 真人) was not a popular one in Warring States times; it appears only once each in the extant *Guiguzi* 鬼谷子, *Dengxizi* 鄧析子, and *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子 and their meanings are different from one another. In the *Guiguzi*, it signifies perfect humanity endowed by heaven (Xu 2010: 198, in the “Benjing yinfu qishu” 本經陰符七術 chapter) whereas it refers to a man of penetrating wisdom and appropriate actions in the *Dengxizi* (Wang K. 1996a, b: 6, in the “Wuhou” 無厚 chapter). And *Heguanzi*'s True Man is an adept who excels in the military arts (Lu 1935-1937: 82, in the “Shibing” 世兵 chapter). In contrast, the term appears nine times in the “Dazongshi” chapter and as many times in the Outer and Mixed Chapters. However, the term signifies different ideals of humanity in each of the three chapter divisions of the *Zhuangzi*. In the “Dazongshi” chapter, the True Man requires self-cultivation and “true knowledge” (*zhenzhi* 真知) that can differentiate the boundary between heaven and man. He has marvellous powers of various sorts. The True Man in the Outer and Mixed chapters is dissimilar.

Let us now look at the True Man described in the *Shiji*. A magician surnamed Lu 盧 convinced the First Emperor of Qin that “the True Man could enter the water and not get wet, could enter the fire and not get burned. He could ride the clouds and vapors and live as long as heaven and earth” 真人者, 入水不濡, 入火不熱, 陵雲氣, 與天地久長 (Sima 1963: 1.6.257). As is well known, the First Emperor was obsessed with physical immortality and was fervidly looking for elixirs of life. It is immediately evident in the magician's account that only the True Man in the “Dazongshi” chapter can qualify to be the immortal in the First Emperor's dream and matches his exact description in the same language. In spite of its brief length, this evidence seems to prove that the Inner Chapters did exist in Warring States times unless we demand that magician Lu must have named the *Zhuangzi* explicitly

as the source of his fantastic portrayal of the True Man. Alternatively, the evidence could also become problematic if we want to insist that magician Lu was the first person who created said image of the True Man in an attempt to deceive the First Emperor and ZHUANG Zhou or the author of the “Dazongshi” chapter later copied it before SIMA Qian wrote his history. Neither is likely or even possible.

It is worth noting that the True Man was also mentioned once in a dialogue between Tang and his official Yi Yin in the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Annals of Lü Buwei). It reads:

Tang interrogated Yi Yin, “I desire to seize control of the world. How shall I proceed?”

Yi Yin replied, “Though you may desire to seize control of the world, the world cannot be taken. Before it can, you must first gain control of your person.”

As a general principle, the foundation of all undertakings rest in the necessity of first governing your person and being sparing of your “great treasure.” Use the new and expel the stale, so that the circulation with your veins remain free-flowing. Then the vital essence and the ethers will be renewed each day, and evil ethers will be completely expelled, and you will reach your natural life span. If you attain this, you will be called a “True Man.”

湯問於伊尹曰欲取天下若何？伊尹對曰欲取天下，天下不可取。可取，身將先取。凡事之本，必先治身，蓄其大寶。用其新，棄其陳，腠理遂通。精氣日新，邪氣盡去，及其天年。此之謂真人 (Chen 2002: 3.146; Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 102).

Although the dialogue also took place between a ruler and his minister, Tang was still trying to seize control of the world, unlike the First Emperor who had already unified All under Heaven. Here, the True Man lacks supernatural powers and he aims at taking All under Heaven in his governance; self-cultivation, in the form of breathing exercises, is only a necessary step to ideal governance and the True Man seeks to prolong his life to only one hundred years rather than attain immortal transcendence. Evidently, the True Man thus portrayed would not appeal to the First Emperor. Thus, we can rule out the *Lüshi chunqiu* as the inspiration for magician LU, and the “Dazongshi” chapter becomes a real possibility, and indeed the only one known to us today. This means that it (or at least the relevant section in it) existed in the Warring States period.

## 5 Inner Chapters in the Early Han

Professor Wang Shumin identified 202 excerpts of the *Zhuangzi* in the *Huai’nanzi*. Of these, sixty-seven came from the Inner Chapters, eighty-four from the Outer Chapters, and fifty-one from the Mixed Chapters, and only the “Shuo jian” 說劍 (Mixed) chapter was not quoted.<sup>50</sup> Many of the excerpts were verbatim quotations

<sup>50</sup> Chapter 30 “Shuo Jian” is essentially a dialogue between ZHUANGZI and King Huiwen of Zhao where the former persuaded the King to give up sword fighting. Wang Shumin believes that its content had nothing much to do with Prince Huai’nan’s project (Wang 1998: 396), but this is probably not true. The *Huai’nanzi* discusses sword fighting explicitly several times. In any case, it is

while others were cited with slight modifications in wording. Moreover, Wang said there were many other implicit borrowing of ideas from the *Zhuangzi* without using the same language and diction, which he did not include in his publication (Wang 1998: 364–397).<sup>51</sup> In fact, scholars have suggested that the Huai’nan court was probably responsible for compiling a version of *Zhuangzi*. Given the considerable amount of *Zhuangzi*-related texts at their disposal, it seems plausible that the protégés at the court would assemble them into an anthology if it did not already exist as such. After all, these court authors did compile two works under the name of Prince Huai’nan (179 BCE–122 BCE) called *Inner Chapters of Huai’nan* 淮南內 in twenty-one *pian* and *Outer Chapters of Huai’nan* 淮南外 in thirty-three *pian* (Ban 2002: 6.30.1741).<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, two essays on the *Zhuangzi*, entitled “Appended Explanations to the *Zhuangzi*” 莊子后解 and “Essentials of the *Zhuangzi*” 莊子略要 respectively, attributed to Prince Huai’nan were cited by Li Shan 李善 (d. 689); both appear to be interpretive in nature. Evidently, the Prince had a peculiar interest in the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>53</sup>

Although all seven Inner Chapters were quoted in the *Huai’nanzi*, we do not know if their titles also existed, or if the quotations actually belonged to where they would be in our received *Zhuangzi*. Regardless, the Inner Chapters perhaps existed even a little earlier in a source that has hitherto been largely ignored. HAN Ying 韓嬰 (ca. 200 BCE–130 BCE) was an Erudite (*boshi* 博士) during the reign of Emperor Wen 文帝 of Han (r. 180 BCE–157 BCE). A specialist in the *Shi* 詩 (Odes), he composed the *Inner Commentary* 韓詩內傳 and the *Outer Commentary* 韓詩外傳 on the *Shi* but the former was long lost. The latter was an interpretive commentary inclined to extrapolate moral lessons from the original poems. Although HAN referenced a variety of sources other than the *Shi*, he might not name them explicitly, nor did he necessarily quote them verbatim.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, this was the typical way of

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possible that the “Shuo jian” chapter was not even in the Prince’s *Zhuangzi* in the first place. Qian Mu has convincingly argued that the ZHUANGZI in the chapter was in fact ZHUANG Xinzi 莊辛子 (Qian 2002: 512–514). The chapter was somehow included when LIU Xiang edited the *Zhuangzi* for the imperial library. Excavated texts in the future may resolve this mystery. The case of the “Shuo jian” chapter has important implications for the formation of the *Zhuangzi* text as we know it.

<sup>51</sup> Based on Charles LeBlanc’s findings (269 quotations), Harold Roth counts about three hundred excerpts in the *Huai’nanzi* which contain ideas, phrases, or entire paragraphs borrowed from the *Zhuangzi*. See LeBlanc 1985: 83 and Roth 1991: 118.

<sup>52</sup> The court retainers might actually compile only one work, which later was edited and divided into the Inner Chapters and Outer Chapters by LIU Xiang. For a recent discussion of the possibility of a Huai’nan redaction of the *Zhuangzi*, see Bumbacher 2016: 636–643.

<sup>53</sup> Nearly two decades ago in English scholarship, Harold Roth has argued for the Huai’nan court being the compiler of the *Zhuangzi*. See Roth 1991: 79–128. Recently, Esther Klein also has a good discussion of the possible role of the Huai’nan court in the compilation of the *Zhuangzi* that would eventually be passed down to LIU Xiang who was in charge of putting it in order and catalogued it. See Klein 2011: 355–360.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, he cited from nineteen of the *Xunzi*’s thirty-two chapters without indicating the title of his work though his name was mentioned once in one of the quotations (“Yibing” 議兵 chapter of the *Xunzi*). See Xu 1980: 124–126.

quoting texts dating back at least to the Warring States period. Naturally, HAN's sources included texts closely associated with Confucius such as the *Shi* (305 times), *Shu* 書 (Documents, 3), *Yi* (Changes, 6), *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) (1) and a plethora of transmitted records (*chuan yue* 傳曰/ *chuan yun* 傳云, 50 times) of various nature. More importantly, he also quoted from the Warring States philosophers such as MENGZI (at least once), LAOZI (4 times)<sup>55</sup> and ZHUANGZI (at least twice). As will be argued below, at least some of the Inner Chapters in our received *Zhuangzi* might have been in HAN Ying's possession. But let us first look at the following story:

King Cheng of Chu was reading in the hall, and at work below was Lunbian, who asked, "What is the book Your Highness is reading?"

King Cheng said: "It is a book of the Former Sages."

Lunbian said: "It is certainly only the dregs of the Former Sages, and not their essence."

King Cheng said: "What grounds have you for saying that?"

Lunbian said: "Let us put it in terms of the wheels I make. With the compass I make them round, and with a square I make them straight. These [techniques] I can pass on to my sons and grandsons. But when it comes to bringing three pieces of wood together, there is a response in the heart and a movement in the body which there is no way to transmit. Hence what has been transmitted is certainly nothing but the dregs. Thus it is possible to examine the methods of Tang and Yu, but there is no attaining to their illumination of the hearts. The *Odes* says,

The doings of High Heaven  
Have neither sound and smell.  
Who can attain to this?"

楚成王讀書於殿上，而倫扁在下，作而問曰不審主君所讀何書也？成王曰先聖之書。倫扁曰此真先聖王之糟粕耳！非美者也。成王曰子何以言之？倫扁曰以臣輪言之。夫以規為圓，矩為方，此其可付子孫者也。若夫合三木而為一，應乎心，動乎體，其不可得而傳者也。則凡所傳，真糟粕耳。故唐虞之法，可得而考也，其喻人心，不可及矣。詩曰上天之載，無聲無臭。其孰能及之 (Xu 1980: 327; Hightower 1975: 310–311; romanization converted to *pinyin*).

While the exact details are not identical, this story no doubt was borrowed from a famous tale in the "Tiandao" 天道 (Outer) chapter of *Zhuangzi*, which reads as follows:

Duke Huan was in his hall reading a book. The wheelwright Bian, who was in the yard below chiseling a wheel, laid down his mallet and chisel, stepped up into the hall, and said to Duke Huan, "This book Your Grace is reading - may I venture to ask whose words are in it?"

"The words of the sages," said the duke.

"Are the sages still alive?"

"Dead long ago," said the duke.

"In that case, what you are reading there is nothing but the chaff and dregs of the men of old!"

"Since when does a wheelwright have permission to comment on the books I read?" said Duke Huan. "If you have some explanation, well and good. If not, it's your life!"

Wheelwright Bian said: "I look at it from the point of view of my own work. When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too gentle, the chisel slides and won't take

<sup>55</sup> While three chapters (7, 36, 44) of the *Laozi* were cited explicitly, Chapter 47 was also assimilated into HAN Ying's two other stories to illustrate lines from two poems. See Xu 1980: 127, 190; Hightower 1975: 123, 181. Neither allusion was recognized by Hightower.

hold. But if they're too hard, it bites in and won't budge. Not too gentle, not too hard - you can get it in your hand and feel it in your mind. You can't put it into words, and yet there's a knack to it somehow. I can't teach it to my son, and he can't learn it from me. So I've gone along for seventy years and at my age I'm still chiseling wheels. When the men of old died, they took with them the things that couldn't be handed down. So what you are reading there must be nothing but the chaff and dregs of the men of old."

桓公讀書於堂上，輪扁斲輪於堂下，釋椎鑿而上，問桓公曰敢問公之所讀者何言邪？公曰聖人之言也。曰聖人在乎？公曰已死矣。曰然則君之所讀者，古人之糟魄已夫！桓公曰寡人讀書，輪人安得議乎！有說則可，無說則死。輪扁曰臣也，以臣之事觀之。斲輪，徐則甘而不固，疾則苦而不入。不徐不疾，得之於手而應於心，口不能言，有數存焉於其間。臣不能以喻臣之子，臣之子亦不能受之於臣，是以行年七十而老斲輪。古之人與其不可傳也死矣，然則君之所讀者，古人之糟魄已夫（Guo 1985: 490-491; Watson 1968: 152-153; romanization converted to pinyin).

As Hightower mentioned in his footnote, HAN Ying's illustrative story was modified from the *Zhuangzi* tale; Lunbian (輪扁) was actually wheelwright Bian whereas King Cheng of Chu replaced Duke Huan for the sake of merely giving the loan tale a facelift. Of course, the story was substantively refashioned for a new purpose<sup>56</sup> and this is precisely HAN Ying's *modus operandi* of interpretation in his *Outer Commentary*<sup>57</sup>—his hermeneutic interest was much different from SIMA Qian's concern for historical values, and we must understand this in order to appreciate how he appropriated his sources creatively.

Now let us examine another episode from the *Outer Commentary*:

Dai Jinsheng, in a worn gown and cap, went to see the King of Liang, who said: "Some time ago I invited you [to serve me] with the salary of a Great Officer of upper rank, but you would not stay. And now you have come to me?"

Dai Jinsheng laughed merrily, then looking up with a long sigh, he said: "Alas, from this I see that Your Highness has never been worthy associating with. Have you not seen the pheasant in a large marsh? Every five steps he pecks [at the ground], and only at the end of the day is he full. His feathers are rich and glossy, glistening and shining under the sun and moon. He flaps his wings and sings arrogantly, so that the sound echoes from the hills and through the marsh. Why does he do so? Because he enjoys what he wants. If you take him away and put him inside a granary, so that he is constantly pecking up millet, he will be full before the sun is up. But his feathers will be dull and bedraggled, and his appetite and *qi* increasingly decline. He hangs his head and does not sing. Is it possibly because his food is not good? It is because he has not what he wants. Now when I have not counted it far to come a thousand li to be with Your Highness, was it possibly because [otherwise] my food would have been insufficient? It was simply because I ventured to admire your principles. I used to think you were fond of gentlemen, and without a peer in the empire. Now that I clearly see that you are not fond of gentlemen." Taking his leave he departed, and never came back again.

戴晉生弊衣冠而往見梁王。梁王曰前日寡人以上大夫之祿要先生，先生不留；今過寡人邪？戴晉生欣然而笑，仰而永嘆曰嗟乎！由此觀之，君曾不足與遊也。君不見大澤中雉乎？五步一嚙，終日乃飽；羽毛悅澤，光照於日月；奮翼爭鳴，聲響於陵澤者何？彼

<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the *Hanshi waizhuan*, the "Daoying xun" 道應訓 chapter of the *Huai'nanzi* copied the *Zhuangzi* story verbatim but it was also made to serve a new purpose, namely, to interpret the first chapter of the *Laozi*. See Liu 1989: 391.

<sup>57</sup> Based on fragments compiled by Qing scholars, HAN Ying's *Inner Commentary* consisted exclusively of textual glosses.



樂其志也。援置之困倉中，常囑梁粟，不旦時而飽；然猶羽毛憔悴，志氣益下，低頭不鳴，夫食豈不善哉？彼不得其志故也。今臣不遠千里而從君遊者，豈食不足？竊慕君之道耳，臣始以君為好士，天下無雙，乃今見君不好士明矣！辭而去，終不復往 (Xu 1980: 174–175; Hightower 1975: 166–167; romanization converted to pinyin).

Typically, HAN Ying would append an excerpt from the *Shi* to substantiate the story. Or possibly, the story was meant to illustrate some lines of the poem quoted halfway and/or at the end. Yet, in this case, nothing was appended and the story stood on its own, but this is not exactly unusual in the *Outer Commentary* as there are twenty-four such cases in the work and all of them involved historical figures.<sup>58</sup>

Now, let us compare it with the pheasant anecdote from the “Yangsheng zhu” 養生主 (Inner) chapter of our received *Zhuangzi*. It reads:

The swamp pheasant has to walk ten paces for one peck and a hundred paces for one drink, but it doesn’t want to be kept in a cage. Though you treat it like a king, its spirit won’t be content” (Guo 1985: 126; Watson 1968: 52).

The transformation of the *Zhuangzi* story may look too different to some scholars who may not agree that the source came from the *Zhuangzi*, but as demonstrated above, this is indeed typical of HAN Ying’s exegetical strategy. Moreover, in all extant pre-Han literature, no pheasant story can be found anywhere,<sup>59</sup> let alone one specifically about the primacy of the self over material gain and physical comfort. Similarly, the protagonist Dai Jinsheng 戴晉生 in the new story might have been a fictitious character invented by HAN Ying; it did not appear elsewhere in extant literature before the Han. However, it is possible that the character was borrowed from the *Zhuangzi*. In the “Zeyang” 則陽 (Mixed) chapter, the protagonist of one story is called Dai Jinren 戴晉人, who compares the warfare between two states to the fight between the two horns of a snail (Guo 1985: 888–894; Watson 1968: 284–285).<sup>60</sup> Whether or not these stories were all historically true, of course, is another matter but HAN Ying’s story evidently was inspired by the “Yangshengzhu” chapter. As HAN Ying was an Erudite during the reign of Emperor Wen of Han, the *Zhuangzi* text he read might be similar to the bamboo-strip *Zhuangzi* unearthed from Fuyang 阜陽 (ca. 165 BCE)<sup>61</sup> and Zhangjiashan 張家山 (ca. 179 BCE–157 BCE), which probably dated back to the Warring States period.

<sup>58</sup> James Hightower says that “[t]he absence of a concluding quotation from the *Shih ching* (*Shijing*) for twenty-four paragraphs suggests a defective text.” See Hightower 1993: 125.

<sup>59</sup> In *Analec*s 10.27, Confucius appeared to have noticed a startled bird that rose up and circled around before landing again, and he remarked that “The female pheasant (雌雉) on the mountain bridge, how timely her action is, how timely her action is!” See Lau 1979: 105. However, it is hard to prove that this inspired the *Hanshi waizhuan* story.

<sup>60</sup> It is possible that Dai Jinsheng are actually Dai Jinren as 生 (\*sreŋ) and 人 (\*ni[ŋ]) were phonologically similar in Old Chinese. Reconstruction of Old Chinese pronunciation is based on Baxter and Sagart 2014.

<sup>61</sup> The Fuyang *Zhuangzi* find might have contained the “Renjianshi” chapter but not the “Tiandao” chapter that were cited in the *Hanshi waizhuan*. See discussion below.



## 6 Inner Chapters in the Warring States

In ascertaining the existence of the Inner Chapters in the Warring States, Klein curiously seems to even doubt if ZHUANGZI himself was a real person. For her, “the existence of a historical ZHUANG Zhou is tenuous” (Klein 2011: 309). As she observes, ZHUANGZI was first mentioned in the “Jiebi” 解蔽 chapter of the *Xunzi* outside the *Zhuangzi* but she questions if the text in review is “authentic” without giving any reason or evidence (Klein 2011: 335).<sup>62</sup> Insofar as the authorship of the “Jiebi” chapter cannot be refuted, one single mention of ZHUANGZI is sufficient to establish his historicity unless we want to argue that XUNZI invented a straw man for his criticism. In fact, even if XUNZI did not pen the chapter, as long as it was a Warring States text, it already proved that ZHUANGZI was a historical figure who had lived shortly before or contemporaneously with XUNZI. On the other hand, given the powerful and (as XUNZI sees it) pernicious influence of ZHUANGZI’s thought in his time, it is hard to imagine that XUNZI, a leading authority (he was thrice bestowed the office of libationer) at the Jixia 稷下 Academy of learned scholars and thinkers in the capital of Qi, would be credulous enough to believe in the existence of an imaginary figure, and that he would not bother to ascertain his identity before launching his criticism. On the other hand, even if XUNZI invented a straw man called ZHUANGZI, it is inconceivable that the scholars at Jixia Academy coming from virtually every state would be so foolishly and easily hoodwinked. In fact, not only was XUNZI familiar with the writings attributed to ZHUANGZI, but he also quoted from them. We must remember that he actually criticized five other historical figures along with ZHUANGZI, and some of them such as SHENZI 慎子 (350 BCE–275 BCE) also read the writings attributed to ZHUANGZI and quoted from them.<sup>63</sup>

More critically, Klein, taking the cue from XUNZI, analyzes the idea of *tian* 天 (heaven/nature) in ZHUANGZI’s thought in order to prove that XUNZI had no knowledge of the Inner Chapters. However, her analysis is problematic if not incorrect (Klein 2011: 333–337), yet given space constraints, a detailed rebuttal is not possible here. Suffice it to say, while XUNZI complained that ZHUANGZI was “blinded by *tian* and failed to recognize human effort” (蔽於天而不知人), the thrust of his criticism actually resided in the consequence of such erroneous view, namely, “the Way would be completely reduced to reliance” 道盡因矣 (Wang 1997: 393). While it is true, as Klein states, that the emphasis on *tian* is not only present in the Inner Chapters but also in almost all other chapters in the *Zhuangzi*, the advocacy of “reliance” and “going-along” (*yin* 因) is indeed unique to the former. It appears in virtually all of the seven Inner Chapters: “going along with the natural makeup” 因其固

<sup>62</sup> John Knoblock, whom Klein quotes regarding the title of the “Jiebi” (“Dispelling Blindness”) chapter, specifically states that XUNZI “authored” it when he was a young man. See Knoblock 1994: vii (Preface). In fact, Knoblock does not question the authenticity of the *Xunzi*. See Knoblock 1988: 105–128.

<sup>63</sup> Wang Shumin has identified dozens of explicit and implicit quotations from the *Zhuangzi* in the *Xunzi*, *Guanzi* 管子, *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, *Yinwenzi* 尹文子 (350 BCE–285 BCE), *Shenzi*, and *Lüshi chunqiu*. See Wang 1996a, b: 226–266.

然 in the “Yangshengzhu” chapter and “let things be the way they are and doesn’t try to help life along” 常因自然而不益生 in the “Dechong fu” 德充符 chapter, to name two examples (Guo 1985: 119, 221; Watson 1968: 51, 75–76). In the “Qiwulun” chapter, the explicit doctrine of “going along with this” *yinshi* 因是 (Guo 1985: 66–79; Watson 1968: 39–41) is elaborated at great length; it is indeed the epitome of *yin*. This is because in the context of Warring States disputation, *yin* inevitably implicates an “other” or a “that,” and the self-other/this-that relation was a tremendous challenge to overcome if the disputer’s goal was to win, but it would be much harder to dissolve the antithetical relation altogether, and this was precisely the goal ZHUANGZI set for himself. For this task, ZHUANGZI proposed the doctrine of *yinshi* which attempts to embrace a perspective which recognizes all things, or all parties to a debate, equally as a “this” without pitting them against one another in an irreconcilable dichotomy of this and that. This is the Way that ZHUANGZI tried to expound in “making all things equal” (齊物) and it became the intended target of XUNZI’s criticism.<sup>64</sup> In this sense, XUNZI believed ZHUANGZI’s thought was peculiarly all about “reliance.” For XUNZI, *yinshi* would seem to negate human agency in proactively taking advantage of heaven for the benefits of humanity. Indeed, he said: “Rather than rely on things to multiply themselves on their own, is it not better to maximize human effort to transform them” 因物而多之, 孰與騁能而化之 (Wang 1997: 317)? In XUNZI’s critical evaluation, a doctrine about exclusive reliance on heaven would be objectionable, though reliance itself should not be disregarded. Viewed in such light, XUNZI’s condemnation actually proved that at least the “Qiwulun” as part of the Inner Chapters existed in the Warring States and that it was attributed to ZHUANGZI.

Scholars have combed Warring States texts thoroughly for borrowings from the *Zhuangzi*, and many of them were identified and for a long time have been accepted at least tacitly. But when loan passages in other texts are used to ascertain the dating of the textual strata of the received *Zhuangzi*, the issue becomes much more complicated. Not only do the supposed textual strata of the *Zhuangzi* themselves become the subject of scrutiny, but the dating and compositional nature of the texts themselves which might have borrowed from it are open to question as well. Borrowing demands solid evidence to substantiate, which is not easy to come by. Yet, solid evidence is not necessarily hard evidence. Given the nature of the *Zhuangzi*, philosophical and intellectual-historical arguments could serve well to help identify philosophical loans. Insofar as extant literature from pre-Han times are considered sufficient data, the peculiar reference to the pheasant in the “Yangshengzhu” chapter, for instance, should be regarded as the source for the *Hanshi waizhuan* story discussed above.<sup>65</sup> Klein employs a flexible notion of textual parallel, which, if I am

<sup>64</sup> Whether or not XUNZI’s criticism was accurate and fair is not our concern here.

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* text itself was not immune to such implicit borrowing from other texts and cultural tropes that shared its intellectual milieu and from earlier traditions. A good example is its direct borrowing from the *Analec*ts in the creation of the Sunshu Ao character discussed above. The trope of the tiger in the “Renjianshi” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* is another example. See Lo 2019a, b: 225–252.

not mistaken, can accommodate varying degrees of borrowing including adaptation, allusion, and inspiration. This is a sensible and commendable approach, given the way texts were recognized and cited in Warring States and Han times. Yet, when she examines textual parallels, she appears to be rigid about textual sameness and restricts herself in recognizing the usefulness of her sources.

The *Lüshi chunqiu* contains the following story:

Butcher Ding of Song was so devoted to butchering oxen that he looked at nothing except dead oxen. For three years he did not even see a live ox. He had used his knife for nineteen years, and the blade was as if it had been just sharpened. This happened because he was in accord with its natural principles and was intent on the oxen.

宋之庖丁好解牛，所見無非死牛者；三年而不見生牛；用刀十九年，刃若新磨，順其理，誠乎牛也 (Chen 2002: 3.146; Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 220).

In spite of its lack of details, it is immediately recognizable that the story is similar to the famous Butcher Ding story in the “Yangshengzhu” (Inner) chapter in the *Zhuangzi*. Klein acknowledges that it is a “relatively brief allusion” to a “fully dramatized narrative in the *Zhuangzi*” and “the details are specific enough, however, to make the connection unmistakable” (Klein 2011: 345). This is a fair, judicious, and valid observation. Yet, based on a truncated reference to the story in JIZANG’s 吉藏 (548–623) oral commentary (*shu* 疏) on the Madhyamaka text *Bailun* 百論,<sup>66</sup> Klein entertains the possibility that the Buddhist monk might not have referred to the story in the “Yangshengzhu” chapter, thereby undermining the claim that the Inner Chapters existed in the Warring States period. Let us first look at JIZANG’s reference. It reads:

In the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, Butcher Ding did not see a whole ox for twelve years.  
莊子外篇庖丁十二年不見全牛 (CBETA, T42n1827.235c23–24).

First of all, it must be pointed out that JIZANG’s commentary was actually the record of his extemporaneous lecture on the *Bailun*<sup>67</sup> and the citation comes from his Preface where he stated at the onset that it was given in the tenth month of the fourth year (608) of the Daye 大業 reign of Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 581–604) of Sui 隋. The citation was not a random remark but meant to illustrate a specific point (see below). Second, the text was not corrupted as Liu Xiaogan claims (Liu 2015: 138) because in another lecture four months earlier on the *Shiermen lun* 十二門論—another Madhyamaka text—JIZANG also made use of the identical quotation (CBETA,

<sup>66</sup>The commentary was first brought to bear on the discussion of the internal structure of the *Zhuangzi* by Professor Wang Shumin, who did not question the provenance of the reference in the “Yangsheng zhu” chapter. See Wang 2007: 18.

<sup>67</sup>For a discussion of the oral nature of *shu* commentary originated in Buddhist sermons, see Mou 1987: 239–302 and Lo 2002: 89–116; 2006: 69–90; 2010: 149–175. *Shu* commentaries were either prepared before the lecture or recorded afterwards. Given the length of his commentary, JIZANG must have spent weeks explicating the *Bailun*. This might explain why some of his off-the-cuff comments contradicted each other as he might have forgotten what he had said earlier in his lecture, which after all was not important to the substance he wanted to deliver to his audience.

T42n1825.173b29-c1).<sup>68</sup> As far as the content of the story is concerned, the citation does not yield much information but it says Butcher Ding did not see a whole ox for only twelve years instead of nineteen in the “Yangshengzhu” chapter. As will become clear shortly, there was a reason.

On the surface, JIZANG seemed to have read the story in one of the outer chapters, but we cannot tell how it differed from the story in the “Yangshengzhu” chapter except for the detail about the different length of time the butcher did not see a whole ox. On the other hand, it is crucial to note that Wang Shuming’s citation is incomplete; indeed, JIZANG’s reference continues:

It (the *Zhuangzi*) also made use of an event that lasted twelve years. “Not seeing a whole ox” means “not seeing a collective ox apart from the four limbs and the hundred parts.” This [view] supersedes the four heretical views in India, all of which believed in [the existence of] a collective ox.

亦用十二季 [variant for 年] 事。不見全牛者，不見四支百體外，別有總牛。此勝天竺四外道，並計有總牛 (CBETA, T42n1827.235c24–26).

It is now clear that JIZANG’s interest in the Butcher Ding’s story in this context was only confined to *the length of time* the butcher did not see a whole ox as well as the metaphoric significance of his ability. For JIZANG, the non-entity of a whole ox means emptiness, or *śūnyata* in Buddhism—the main tenet of the Middle Path in Madhyamaka.

But why is twelve years important at all? The answer lies in JIZANG’s explanation immediately prior to the Wang’s citation. It reads:

Kumārajīva’s father was called Kumārayana and his *mother* Jīva, which means long life. Kumārayana means child. Thus, Kumārajīva means a child with a long life. It was a different custom [in Kumārajīva’s homeland, Kucha] to combine the names of the parents to make one for the child, but this precisely says that both parents had fine names and they wanted the best for their child, so they combined their names for his. In our own land, the intelligent scholar Zhang Rong (444–497) named his child Rong as well, and when people asked him the reason, he replied, “Father happy son happy, happy happy, endlessly happy.” [Like Kumārajīva’s parents,] Zhang also meant to glorify his son.”....

Someone asked, “What kind of name is Jīva?”

[JIZANG] replied, “Jīva refers to his *father’s* name Jīva. It was a fine name there [in Kucha], so it was meant to express admiration for the person [by that name].”

“How many years did monk Zhao stay with Kumārajīva such that he said [it was] ‘over the years’?”

“Kumārajīva arrived in Chang’an in the twelfth month of the third year (401) of the Hongshi reign and died in the twelfth month of the seventh year (405); he stayed there for five years altogether. In “On the Namelessness of Nirvana,” Lord Zhao said: ‘He studied with Kumārajīva for over ten years.’ [Another version] also said “twelve years,” which refers precisely to the exact number [of years] in one *jī*. Thus for this reason alone, [this alternative version] adopted it.”

鳩摩羅什者，父名鳩摩羅炎，母曰耆婆。耆婆云壽，鳩摩羅炎云童，即童壽也。合取父母兩秤為兒一名者，風俗異也。正言父母兩秤，並是美名，欲令兒好，故合字之。此方達士張融為兒立名，亦云融。人問之其故，答云父融子融，融融融不絕。亦是美其子也。.....問什是何名。答什者父什，此問之美名，故以歎其人也。問筆值什得幾

<sup>68</sup> The quotation served to make a different point but it did not give any more details about the Butcher Ding story. More discussion below.

年而秤累年。答什以弘始三年十二月至長安，弘始七年十二月亡，首尾五年。而肇公涅槃論云在什公門下十有餘年<sup>69</sup>。亦云十有二年者，正言十二年是一紀之員數，故用之耳 (CBETA, T42n1827.235c9–23).

A side note is in order. The narrative above is somewhat truncated because it was a record of JIZANG's extemporaneous sermon and the interlocutors were probably members in the audience who might have raised questions at different moments during the sermon, as such, they were not necessarily related to one another. Let us now examine JIZANG's remarks.

In reality, KUMĀRAJĪVA translated the *Bailun* twice in 402 and 404 respectively. In the quotation above, JIZANG introduced the translator to his audience and his cavalier tone was quite common in Buddhist lectures since early medieval times. In fact, entertainment sometimes was deemed appropriate in order to sustain the interest of the audience (Lo 2002 and 2006). Although learned monks such as JIZANG routinely referred to non-Buddhist literature to help elucidate the philosophical points in their lectures, the facticity of their references was not their essential concern—a common practice in Buddhist sermonization. While the etiology and meaning of KUMĀRAJĪVA's name were explained in his biography in SENG You's 僧祐 (445–518) *Chu Sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Collection of Notices on the Tripiṭaka) and HUIJIAO's 慧皎 (497–554) *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Lives of Eminent Monks), which was largely based on SENG You's account, it was not mentioned in the official biography of KUMĀRAJĪVA in the *Jin History*, which was completed in 648, twenty-five years after JIZANG's death. Similarly, the episode about ZHANG Rong, who embraced the Buddhist faith, was not found in his official biography in the *Nan Qi History* 南齊書, or anywhere else. Both tales might have been circulated orally in JIZANG's time or simply invented by him. In any event, given their amusing nature, it is understandable why JIZANG would try to spice up his lecture with them.

SENG Zhao 僧肇 (384–414, often referred to honorifically as Lord Zhao) was one of the most esteemed disciples of KUMĀRAJĪVA and he himself mentioned in “On the Namelessness of Nirvana” that he had studied with KUMĀRAJĪVA for more than ten years. In the commentary, the digression to the time he spent with KUMĀRAJĪVA further sustained JIZANG's effort to entertain his audience. It should be noted that KUMĀRAJĪVA actually died in 413, not in 405 as JIZANG claimed but it did not seem to matter to him.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, a listener with a critical ear would be surprised that JIZANG initially explained that Jīva was the name of KUMĀRAJĪVA's mother and later declared it referred to his father's name. Similarly, his claim that SENG Zhao spent *twelve* years with his master cannot be substantiated. While the issue was moot in the first place, JIZANG took the opportunity to bring in the Butcher Ding story, and from there he further digressed into the metaphorical significance of not seeing a whole ox. This kind of spontaneous but convoluted quip was not uncommon in

<sup>69</sup> The full title of SENG Zhao's work is 涅槃無名論. In the original text, it reads “十有餘載” instead, which means the same.

<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in another public lecture on the *Lotus Sutra*, JIZANG even argued against the witness account of KUMĀRAJĪVA's two disciples that their master translated the sutra in the eighth year (406) of the Hongshi reign and claimed that it was done in 408 instead. See CBETA, T34n1722.649c15–24. If KUMĀRAJĪVA indeed died in 405 as JIZANG professed in his commentary on the *Bailun*, he obviously contradicted himself.

Buddhist lectures. It is clear and evident that JIZANG's reference should be taken with a grain of salt. He was liable to fabricating convenient references deliberately and misquoting them expediently for his immediate purpose. Indeed, at the beginning of his talk, JIZANG confessed that he would lecture in accordance with the order of the *Bailun* text and would not double check his sources 因講次直疏, 出不事訪也 (T42n1827.232a5).<sup>71</sup> Thus, his claim that the Butcher Ding story came from an outer chapter was in all likelihood groundless.<sup>72</sup> In fact, it was common for monks to quote the *Zhuangzi* in Tang times, and oftentimes it was misquoted in various ways, thus JIZANG was by no means an exception. On the other hand, since the fifth century when the first recorded allusion to the Butcher Ding story appeared in Buddhist literature until the end of the Qing dynasty, there were 174 citations altogether in the Buddhist canons and all of them stated "nineteen years" if the length of time was mentioned at all, except the two references by JIZANG. Moreover, when "nineteen years" was mentioned, the number never took on any special significance.

Liu Xiaogan contends that JIZANG's quotation probably came either from another version of the Butcher Ding story or a similar story in the Outer Chapters that was eventually expunged (Liu 2015: 138–139). This is certainly possible if we base our investigation on the truncated quotation alone. Klein wonders why JIZANG would prefer to cite the version of the story in the outer chapter if there indeed was another version in the inner chapter of *Zhuangzi* he read (Klein 2011: 346). The context of the quotation analyzed above should dispel her curiosity and render Liu's speculation unnecessary.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, JIZANG himself cited GUO Xiang's commentary, which does not contain the truncated quotation in the Outer Chapters,<sup>74</sup> the mention

<sup>71</sup> Four months earlier before his talk on the *Bailun*, on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the sixth month in 608, JIZANG lectured on the *Shiermen lun* (十二門論) and at the onset, he also expressed that it was an extemporaneous lecture. In it, he cited the Butcher Ding story in exactly the same fashion again without new details and he made the same claim about its provenance, but in the same breath he also called his source "the book" (*shu* 書), rather than the *Zhuangzi*. To him, the distinction between Inner Chapters and Outer Chapters made no difference. See T42n1825.171a5, 173b29–c1. JIZANG also misquoted Chapter 73 of the *Laozi* by one character in the same context and he merely called his source "the book." See 173c8–9.

<sup>72</sup> In 627 Yuankang 元康 gave a lecture (*shu* 疏) on the *Zhaolun* 肇論, and in it he also cited the Butcher Ding story. Not only did he cite virtually the entire story verbatim but he also said it came from the "Neipian Yangsheng zhang" 內篇養生章, namely, the section on Butcher Ding in the "Yangshengzhu" chapter of the Inner Chapters. See T45n1859.176c13–24. In spite of that, Yuankang also made up interesting stories about Kumārajīva's name and even quoted incorrectly from his biography in Huijiao's *Lives of Eminent Monks* for his source. See T45n1859.176a27–b6. He also mistakenly attributed Chapters 16 and 25 of the *Laozi* to the *Zhuangzi*. See 189a8–9, 190a28–b1.

<sup>73</sup> Klein also says: "the *Lüshi chungiu* citation and that of Ji Zang are closely comparable. If there were at some point two versions of the story, and Ji Zang's reference is to the outer chapter version, the *Lüshi chungiu* citation could easily have come from that outer chapter version as well." With only one short line from JIZANG's reference, it is baffling to see any real basis for meaningful comparison between it and the *Lüshi chungiu* citation, let alone the claim that they are "closely comparable." See Klein 2011: 346.

<sup>74</sup> In fact, JIZANG's quotation of GUO Xiang's commentary also contained fabrication and was not faithful to the original as we have it today. See his commentary on the *Zhongguan lun* 中觀論疏 in CBETA T42n1824.4a06–09.



of “twelve years” was certainly a mistake. Since JIZANG’s testimony was not reliable, it is safe to conclude that the Butcher Ding story in the *Lüshi chunqiu* did come from the “Yangshengzhu” chapter of *Zhuangzi* as far as extant literature is concerned.

In addition, another passage in the *Lüshi chunqiu* might have been inspired by the “Qiwulun” chapter as well, and it has been overlooked in previous attempts to track down the Inner Chapters in Warring States times. It reads:

Achievement precedes a good reputation, effective policy precedes achievement, and good advice precedes effective policy. If a person does not recognize effective policies, how will he be capable of judging the quality of advice? If he does not understand the true nature of things, how will he be capable of determining whether the advice suits the circumstances? Between good advice and the chirping of fledgling birds, is there a difference or is there none?

功先名，事先功，言先事。不知事惡能聽言？不知情惡能當言？其與人穀言也，<sup>75</sup>其有辯乎？其無辯乎 (Chen 2002: 703; Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 290–291)?

Now, compare it with the relevant passage in the “Qiwulun”:

Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn’t there?

夫言非吹也。言者有言，其所言者特未定也。果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？其以為異於鷇音，亦有辯乎，其無辯乎 (Guo 1985: 63; Watson 1968: 39)?

The comparison of human words to the peeps of baby birds was unique to the *Zhuangzi* in extant literature up until the Warring States. As such, the *Lüshi chunqiu* passage from one of the “Examinations” (*lan* 覽), which were completed in or later than 239 BCE (Carson and Loewe 1993: 324; Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 19–20, 27–32), should have borrowed from it rather than the other way around, unless, of course, we could prove that the “Qiwulun” chapter was written in the early Han.

## 7 Archaeological Evidence

So far there are two separate archaeological findings of texts that claim to correspond to our received *Zhuangzi*; they were unearthed in Han tombs in Fuyang 阜陽 (ca. 165 BCE) in the spring of 1977 (Wang and Han 1978: 12–31, 98–99) and Zhangjiashan 張家山 (ca. 179 BCE–157 BCE) in 1983–1984. The latter consists of forty-four bamboo strips whose content is essentially the same as the first section of the “Daozhi” 盜跖 chapter in the *Zhuangzi*, namely, the story of Robber Zhi chastising Confucius who attempted to persuade him to abandon his immoral way of living. Notably, the chapter bears the title of “Daozhi” though the character for “Zhi” is an unusual variant. According to Liao Mingchun’s 廖名春 calculation, the Zhangjiashan text consists of about 1692 words and the “Daozhi” chapter is 1748 words in length. Furthermore, he notes, the additions came after GUO Xiang’s time

<sup>75</sup> Scholars generally agree that *gu* 穀 (good, grain) in the *Lüshi chunqiu* should be *kou* 鷇 (chick) instead.



because the commentator only made one remark on the Robber Zhi story and said nothing thereafter in the chapter; this suggests that his redaction contained only one story. Thus, Liao argues that the Zhangjiashan text represents the original form of the story and the “Daozhi” chapter in our *Zhuangzi* text was mixed with later additions (Liao 1996: 90–100). Liao’s analysis is convincing. Yet, this discovery does not prove that the Inner Chapters existed in the mid-second century BCE. Indeed, since the Zhangjiashan Daozhi story appears to be an independent text, it is not certain if it was part of an existing corpus called *Zhuangzi*.

The Fuyang find was originally stored in bamboo containers<sup>76</sup> but they were smashed and crushed beneath other objects probably during the tomb robbery. Many badly-damaged strips were recovered and it was announced months after the excavation that a primer on character recognition called *Canjie pian* 蒼頡篇 (of 300 some characters), the *Shijing* (Odes), and a military text identified as *Xingde* 刑德 had been cleaned up and the remainders of the bamboo slips were under treatment then (Wang and Han 1977: 15). In 2000, Han Ziqiang 韓自強 and Han Chao 韓朝 published a study of eight damaged bamboo slips which they claimed belonged to two Mixed Chapters of our received *Zhuangzi*. They identified two of the slips with the story about Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊 in the “Zeyang” 則陽 chapter and six with the story of Lord Yuan of Song 宋元君 in the “Waiwu” 外物 chapter (Han and Han 2000: 10–14). As it turns out, this is in fact only a preliminary report (more below).

Finally, in 2013, it was announced that forty-four “extraordinarily damaged” bamboo slips were recovered among many others and they appear to have come from one single corpus, and the research team that collated them believe they match up with fifteen chapters from all three divisions of our received *Zhuangzi* (Hu 2013: 188–201).<sup>77</sup> The chapter titles are: “Xiaoyao you,” “Renjianshi” 人間世,<sup>78</sup> “Dazongshi,” “Yingdiwang” 應帝王 (Inner Chapters), “Pianmu” 駢拇, “Zaiyou” 在宥, “Tiandi” 天地, “Zhile” 至樂, “Dasheng” 達生, “Tian Zifang” 田子方, “Zhi beiyou” 知北遊 (Outer Chapters), “Xu Wugui” 徐無鬼, “Zeyang” 則陽, “Yufu,” and “Tianxia” 天下 (Mixed Chapters). However, the slips themselves do not bear any of the chapter titles. It is noteworthy that none of the slips *apparently* belonged to another text other than the *Zhuangzi* as we know it, and this suggests that there was indeed a single work which resembled our received *Zhuangzi*—what Klein calls “proto-*Zhuangzi*”—although it might or might not have the same title or a title

<sup>76</sup>The report does not indicate the number of boxes or hampers so all the recovered slips might have been stored in one or more bamboo container.

<sup>77</sup>Curiously, Hu lists only twelve chapters in his summary, without mentioning the “Xiaoyao you,” “Renjianshi” and the “Yufu” chapters. See Hu 2013: 188.

<sup>78</sup>The unearthed fragments of the presumed Inner Chapters do not include the pheasant story and the analogy of bird chirping cited in the *Lüshi chunqiu*. Esther Klein did not have access to Hu Pingsheng’s report when she published her article, and based on an earlier report of much fewer details, she believed six of the damaged strips from the Fuyang find corresponded to the story of Lord Yuan of Song in the “Waiwu” 外物 (Outer) chapter of our received *Zhuangzi*. See Klein 2011: 349–351. However, Hu argues that the writing style of the six strips (actually seven in the Hu’s report) are different from that of the forty-four *Zhuangzi* strips. See Hu 2013: 196.

at all. The tomb had been robbed and excavation was done during heavy rainstorms (Hu 2013: 197), so it is not certain if there was in fact only one single work included in this mass of bamboo-slips. We do not know the number of chapters and their exact contents in the tomb corpus at burial if it indeed contained only *Zhuangzi* materials. Nor is it clear if there were any chapter divisions among the *Zhuangzi*-related corpus. HU Pingsheng 胡平生, however, believes that was indeed the case (Hu 2013: 189). Yet, it is not entirely impossible that the corpus was essentially an undifferentiated mass of texts without being divided into three big chapter clusters such as the case with our received *Zhuangzi*. Even if the fifteen chapters were indeed classified into different clusters, we do not know how many clusters there were and to which cluster each of these chapters belonged. It is possible that there were only two clusters, namely the inner chapters and outer chapters, just like the imperial copy at LIU Xiang's disposal. In fact, we cannot even be certain if the fragmentary strips actually belonged to the respective chapters in our received *Zhuangzi* because none of the strips contains any of the chapter titles under which the research team placed them.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the research team's matching should be considered provisional. In sum, Hu thinks that the dating of Fuyang *Zhuangzi* could not have post-dated the late Warring States period (Hu 2013: 189). Since the find preceded SIMA Qian, he extrapolates that the *Zhuangzi* text in the Grand Archivist's possession also consisted of the Inner, Outer, and Mixed chapters and its contents were complete" 司馬遷所見《莊子》就是一個內、外、雜篇內容完整的本子 (Hu 2013: 189). This is a bold assertion that requires further substantiation. To begin with, it is necessary to determine the meaning of a "complete" *Zhuangzi*. We do not even know if the Fuyang find contained all thirty-three chapters in our received *Zhuangzi*, and even it did, we do know that SIMA Qian's *Zhuangzi* was much larger in word count and the Han imperial version had fifty-two chapters. Klein observes that the juxtaposition of materials from multiple *Zhuangzi* chapters "suggests that by the time of the burial, a body of proto-*Zhuangzi* materials was in the process of coming together. Whether or not it bore the name of *Zhuangzi* is, of course, another matter" (Klein 2011: 351). Although she commented on the Fuyang *Zhuangzi* before the full report on the *Zhuangzi* text was published, her remark was judicious and becomes more pertinent today.

No doubt the Fuyang excavated *Zhuangzi* could provide important clues to our understanding of the formation of the *Zhuangzi* from the Warring States onwards as an independent if not necessarily coherent corpus. Scholars have unanimously accepted the published reports of the research team for the excavation and my analysis above likewise tries to give as much credit to its values as evidence and reason allow. Still, it is perhaps worth noting that the identification of the Fuyang textual fragments as the *Zhuangzi* may be fundamentally problematic in the first place. The reason certainly has much to do with the extraordinarily fragmentary condition of the bamboo slips.

<sup>79</sup> If, as argued below, the Huai'nan court possessed a work titled *Zhuangzi*, its chapters also should each have a title. In that case, the Fuyang find, which came a little later, might have chapter titles as well even if the bamboo slips as a collection of writings might not have a title.

As mentioned above, Han Ziqiang and Han Chao published a study of eight damaged bamboo slips that they claimed belonged to the “Zeyang” chapter and the “Waiwu” chapter of our received *Zhuangzi*. While Han and Han said over a dozen bamboo texts were excavated including the *Cangjie pian*, the *Odes*, the *Yijing* (Changes), and the *Zhuangzi*, they did not mention how many slips were recovered and identified as *Zhuangzi* text, and the readers were given the impression that the eight slips they published and discussed were its entirety.<sup>80</sup> However, this impression was dispelled and their claim was effectively repudiated by Hu’s report thirteen years later. Hu pronounced that there are indeed forty-four slips from the *Zhuangzi* text. As Table 3.2 shows, both reports concur on the five-character slip for the “Zeyang” chapter but Hu’s curiously does not include the five-character slip for the “Rangwang” chapter at all, and no explanation is given. More importantly, although the six slips about the story of Lord Yuan of Song in the “Waiwu” chapter are included in Hu’s report, they are not considered part of the *Zhuangzi* text. Furthermore, the story now has seven slips instead even though the numbers of characters and their actual contents are essentially the same as the six slips published in Han and Han’s report.<sup>81</sup> No explanation is given. The Lord Yuan episode is now recognized as a loose story among numerous others in the same find and listed in an appendix in the report (Hu 2013: 196). Hu mentions that all these loose stories are collected together under the expedient title of *Shuolei zashi* 說類雜事 given by the research team (Hu 2013: 196; Hu 2000: 515–545). This drastic retraction is significant and has profound implications for the finalization of the Fuyang *Zhuangzi* text. In the same year Han and Han made their report, Hu indeed also published a paper where he announced that the research team assembled independent stories from the Fuyang find into a collection called by said title; they are all about the history and people of the Chunqiu and Warring States. Apparently, members of the research team did not agree on the identification of the textual fragments. This is no surprise as they came from badly damaged bamboo slips, and as far as those concerning the *Zhuangzi* text, the fragments are sparse in characters and their contents are much open to speculation. This raises a serious question about the textual origins of all the fragments that both reports ascribed to the *Zhuangzi*.

In Hu’s report, the forty-four broken slips (with pictures) are ascribed to fifteen of the thirty-three chapters and lined up in accordance with the chapter order in our received *Zhuangzi*, however, this does not necessarily mean the slips were originally bound in the same order, in fact, they were probably not. Each of the fifteen identified chapters contains a minimal number of characters from the fewest two to the

<sup>80</sup> Another report came out in 1983 and it focused on introducing the texts on bamboo slips and wooden blocks. The bamboo texts were classified into eleven types including the *Canjie pian*, *Shijing*, *Yijing*, and *Xingde*. Notably, the three wooden blocks recorded the titles of the stories, which resemble accounts in the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 as well as in *Shuoyuan* 說苑 and *Xinyu* 新序 compiled by Liu Xiang. See Fuyang 1983.2: 21–24 and Hu 2000: 515–545.

<sup>81</sup> While Han and Han provide a picture of the eight slips, Hu does not include the seven slips of the Lord Yuan story. We do not know how the same content could be distributed over different number of slips from the same find. Based on the picture provided by Han and Han, the story indeed occupies six slips only.

Table 3.2 Differences between two reports on the Fuyang excavated *Zhuangzi*

Chapters and number of slips	Arrangements of texts			Remarks
	Han and Han (2000)	Hu (2013)		
“Zeyang” 則陽 (1)	有乎生莫見	有乎生莫見		essentially identical
“Rangwang” 讓王 (1)	樂與正為樂	No text provided		absent in Hu
“Waiwu” 外物 (6)	01. 宋元君夜夢丈夫被髮寢	1. 宋元君夜夢丈夫被髮寢		Hu does not consider the 7 slips came from the “Waiwu” chapter; essentially identical
	02. 之是曰龜	2. 之是曰龜		identical
	03. 何得曰得龜往視	3. 何得曰得龜視		identical with one missing character in Hu
	04. 事七十兆而無遺筮故不能	4. 事七十兆而無遺筮故能剗腸之患		04 and 05 on the same slip in Hu, with one missing character (不) in Hu
	05. 剗腸之患			
	06. 有所不知而神有	5. 非有所		06 in Han and Han are distributed on 3 slips in Hu, with 2 missing characters (不 and 而)
		6. 不知		
		7. 神有		

maximum nine on one single broken slip. Moreover, none of the slips contains more than one recovered fragment, and this makes it even more difficult to ascertain the origin of the content-thin fragments as they could conceivably fit in a virtually unlimited number of contexts other than the *Zhuangzi*. In this connection, it seems puzzling why Hu would exclude the Lord Yuan episode from the *Zhuangzi* fragments as this is one of the four clusters of fragments that contain specific markers (such as peculiar objects and people) and contents identical and unique to our received *Zhuangzi* when the other three clusters are included.<sup>82</sup> Hu's reason is that the orthography of the Lord Yuan episode is identical to the other stories in the *Shuolei zashi*.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, orthography is actually one major and perhaps most important criterion by which the fragments are identified as “*Zhuangzi* slips” 莊子簡. Thus, even when the characters on the slips do not match with the corresponding parts in the *Zhuangzi*, Hu still insists that the fragments belonged to it (slips 26, 42 and 44 in Table 3.3).

Apart from orthography, however, one would wonder why fragments without unique contents to the *Zhuangzi* could only come from it and nowhere else, unless we assume that the copyist who copied the clusters of texts specific to the *Zhuangzi* did not also copy other texts. But this is by no means certain partly because we do not know how many bamboo slips were lost to the circumstances. With the exception of the three clusters of fragments (mentioned in note 82), the remaining slips are thin and non-specific in content and could appear in virtually any texts. For instance, there is only one broken slip (01 on Hu's list in Table 3.3) with three characters (是鳥焉) identified for the “Xiaoyao you” chapter, yet they also show up in the *Xunzi*, *Liezi* 列子, and *Shanghai jing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas). Even if the fragment did come from the *Zhuangzi*, it also can be found in the “Shanmu” 山木 chapter other than the “Xiaoyao you” (Guo 1985: 680; Watson 1968: 213), which is not included in Hu's list in Table 3.3. How can we decide to which chapter it actually belonged? Similarly, slip 019 also contains only three characters 虛有道 (meaningless by themselves) and they appear in the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語, *Liezi*, and *Heguanzi* as well. Since there were apparently also stories similar to those in the *Kongzi jiayu* in the Fuyang find, how can we be certain that this homeless fragment might not belong to the *Kongzi jiayu*?

None of the reports on the Fuyang find tells us how many boxes/hampers were discovered or recovered from the tomb, if all the bamboo texts were stored in one single box/hamper or in numerous ones, and most pertinently, if the *Zhuangzi* materials were deposited in their own box/hamper for some reason. If the *Zhuangzi* slips were kept in the same box with slips of other texts, they could easily be mixed together when the box was crushed and the slips were damaged. Even if the *Zhuangzi*

<sup>82</sup> The other three clusters of strips, likewise, contain specific terms 櫟社 (in the Renjianshi” chapter), 齧缺 and 被衣 (aka 蒲衣子, used together in the “Yingdiwang” chapter), 關尹 and 老聃 (used together in the “Tianxia” chapter).

<sup>83</sup> Yet, the miscellaneous stories were most likely not original creations in the first place but culled from other sources such as the *Zhuangzi*, so even if orthography might not allow the slips about the Lord Yuan episode to be grouped with other *Zhuangzi* fragments, it does not rule out the *Zhuangzi* as its source.

**Table 3.3** Fragments in Fuyang excavated *Zhuangzi*

Slip number	Chapter title/section	Textual fragments (with different <i>Zhuangzi</i> parallels below)	Hu's remarks
001	“Xiaoyaoyou” 逍遙遊	☐有鳥焉☐	
002	“Renjianshi” 人間世	☐見櫟社☐	
003	“Dazongshi” 大宗師	☐邪母☐	
004	“Yingdiwang”/1 應帝王	☐齧缺☐	
005	“Yingdiwang”/1	☐☐告被=衣=其☐ 告蒲衣子蒲衣子曰	被衣 is the same as 蒲衣子
006	“Yingdiwang”/2-1	☐☐其昧也徐=其=☐ 其臥徐徐其	昧 (寐) is the same as 臥
007	“Yingdiwang”/2-2	☐天壤☐	
008	“Pianmu”/1-1 駢拇	☐五臧而☐	
009	“Pianmu”/1-2	☐☐使天下簞☐	
010	“Zaiyou”/1 在宥	☐冥解☐☐ 冥解	
011	“Zaiyou”/2-1	☐而不可不因者民也匿☐	
012	“Zaiyou”/2-2	☐☐於義而☐☐	
013	“Zaiyou”/2-3	☐於民而☐ 恃於民而不輕	The right side of the first character is corrupted and what remains looks like 專; the character after 而 is not 不
014	“Tiandi”/1-1 天地	☐通於天地☐	
015	“Tiandi”/1-2	☐☐而百姓定☐ 淵靜而百姓定	The first character is corrupted but what remains looks like the bottom half of the right side of 靜
016	“Tiandi”/2	☐蕩民☐	
017	“Zhile”/1 至樂	☐隨而☐	
018	“Zhile”/2	☐之衆也☐☐ 之累也	
019	“Dasheng”/1 達生	☐庖有道☐☐ 乎有道	
020	“Dasheng”/2	☐游者☐☐	
021	“Dasheng”/3	☐告驚曰公☐ 告敖者曰公	
022	“Tian Zifang”/1-1 田子方	☐不化以☐	
023	“Tian Zifang”/1-2	☐而動☐	

(continued)

**Table 3.3** (continued)

Slip number	Chapter title/section	Textual fragments (with different <i>Zhuangzi</i> parallels below)	Hu's remarks
024	“Tian Zifang”/1-3	□知所終 知其所終	
025	“Tian Zifang”/1-4	☑女求之以有是求☑	
026	“Tian Zifang”/2	而立於獨□之☑ 而立於獨也老	The orthography is same as <i>Zhuangzi</i> slips
027	“Zhi Beiyong”/1 知北遊	☑其序門然□☑ 其序惛然	The right side of 門 was corrupted and Hu argues it was 昏
028	“Zhi Beiyong”/2	☑相整☑ 相整	The fragment has a variant of 整
029	“Xu Wugui” 徐無鬼	☑有器械☑ 有器械	
030	“Zeyang” 則陽	☑□有夫生莫見☑ 有夫生而莫見	
031	“Yufu” 漁父	☑雖威不□☑ 雖嚴不威	
032	“Tianxia”/1 天下	☑夫百家往☑	
033	“Tianxia”/2-1	☑而博□☑ ☑而博不異	The left side of 博 was corrupted and the character after it is not 不
034	“Tianxia”/2-2	☑與先王☑	
035	“Tianxia”/3-1	☑□人以此自行固☑	
036	“Tianxia”/3-2	☑返天下之☑ ☑反天下之☑	
037	“Tianxia”/3-3	☑天下何離於天下其□☑	
038	“Tianxia”/3-4	☑者多以□☑ ☑者多以裘褐	The last character is corrupted but the remaining bit looks like a 衣 radical
039	“Tianxia”/4-1	☑察不以身□	
040	“Tianxia”/4-2	☑可不為也故曰□☑	有所可有所不可
041	“Tianxia”/5	☑極關尹老聃虐☑ 極關尹老聃乎	
042	“Tianxia”/6	☑寓言為☑	
043	“Tiandi” 天地	☑術不治☑ 術予與	The orthography is similar to the <i>Zhuangzi</i> slips but the characters are different
044	“Daozhi” 盜跖	☑也子雖☑ 也丘雖	The orthography is similar to the <i>Zhuangzi</i> slips but the characters are different



slips were originally deposited in a box of their own, when all the boxes and hampers were smashed and their contents were flushed out by the heavy rain, it would still be difficult to ascribe any broken slip to the *Zhuangzi* with certainty if it does not contain any content specific to the text. In this sense, the identity of a number of the forty-four *Zhuangzi* slips in Hu's report remains suspect and needs further confirmation.

The research team acknowledges that the *Zhuangzi* texts were not necessarily copied in an identical writing style by the same hand and that the way they classify the orthography of the texts is "not entirely reliable" 不完全可靠的 (Hu 2013: 197). As mentioned above, the excavated texts were not limited to the alleged *Zhuangzi* fragments, and the research team said they would double-check the texts which were written in different orthography but whose contents might be related to the *Zhuangzi* before they complete their final study of the Fuyang bamboo-slip texts (Hu 2013: 197). It sounds as if they were hoping to identify more *Zhuangzi* fragments from those that are not yet thus ascertained. However, it is not entirely impossible that some of the forty-four slips might be dismissed as *Zhuangzi* fragments either in the final study, or by someone else, as have been the seven slips about Lord Yuan of Song. No final study is forthcoming as of today.

## 8 The Title of the *Zhuangzi*

Even the reasonable doubt above about the Fuyang *Zhuangzi* can be dismissed, the assumption of a complete *Zhuangzi* text is still hard to defend even if we know what it means exactly. Does a complete *Zhuangzi* include a title? The fragmentary Fuyang *Zhuangzi* offers no clues.

If the *Hanshi waizhuan* and Fuyang *Zhuangzi* indeed prove that at least five Inner Chapters in our received *Zhuangzi* existed in the early Han, the *Huai'nanzi*, which came about a generation after the *Hanshi waizhuan* and some twenty years before the Fuyang *Zhuangzi* was entombed, may yield important clues regarding their existence. As we know, many excerpts were ascribed to the *Zhuangzi* over a long stretch of time dating back at least to the time of Prince Huai'nán 淮南王 (179 BCE–122 BCE).<sup>84</sup> In fact, the *Zhuangzi* corpus was quoted most often in the *Huai'nanzi* and was mentioned in tandem with the *Laozi* as LAO-ZHUANG 老莊 (考驗乎老莊之術, 而以合得失之勢者) for the first time in recorded history (Liu 1989: 704).<sup>85</sup> No doubt, this reflected obliquely the

<sup>84</sup> As argued above, at least the story of Butcher Ding in the *Lüshi chunqiu* was more likely to have come from the *Zhuangzi* than Klein might think.

<sup>85</sup> Klein shares the belief with LeBlanc and Roth that the *Zhuangzi* was not "treated as an authority" in the *Huai'nanzi* and enjoyed "a much less hallowed status" in the Former Han. If we can agree that the *Laozi* enjoyed a hallowed and canonical status in the early Han, the fact that the *Zhuangzi* was paired up with such a canon should prove otherwise. See Klein 2011: 357. About fifty years after Prince Huai'nán, YAN Junping 嚴君平 (86 BCE–10 CE), who made a living by fortune-tell-

growing importance of Daoist thought in the early Han as SIMA Qian observed. Obviously, the *Zhuangzi* occupied a unique position in the eclectic work and it must be much more than a mere collection of disparate texts; rather, it was respected as a coherent philosophical identity. As such, the *Zhuangzi* probably already existed as a corpus and it might be compiled by the authors at the Huai'nan court.<sup>86</sup> In the “Daoying xun” 道應訓 chapter, it reads:

Zhuangzi said: ‘The short-lived cannot come up to the long-lived; little understanding cannot come up to great understanding. The morning mushroom knows nothing of twilight and dawn.’ The summer cicada knows nothing of spring and autumn.

莊子曰小年不及大年，小知不及大知，朝菌不知晦朔，蟪蛄不知春秋 (Liu 1989: 410).

Now, let us compare it with the following excerpts from the “Xiaoyao you” (Inner) chapter in the *Zhuangzi*:

Little understanding cannot come up to great understanding; the short-lived cannot come up to the long-lived. *How do I know this is so?* The morning mushroom knows nothing of twilight and dawn; the summer cicada knows nothing of spring and autumn. They are the short-lived.

小知不及大知，小年不及大年。奚以知其然也？朝菌不知晦朔，蟪蛄不知春秋，此小年也 (Guo 1985: 11; Watson 1968: 30).

Although the two passages are not exactly identical—this is indeed customary and common in the Chinese literary tradition, it is beyond doubt that the *Huai'nanzi* quoted from the *Zhuangzi*. Yet, scholars have never wondered if the *Huai'nanzi* was quoting from a work or from an author; they always assume that it was the historical figure ZHUANGZI that was quoted. However, it is worth asking if it was in fact a work titled *Zhuangzi* that was cited instead.

In pre-Han literature, only the *Shi*, *Shu*, *Yi* and sometimes the titles of their particular poems, passages, and chapters were named explicitly when cited. This, of course, does not mean that each of these particulars was always specified in their citations. For instance, in *Analects* 15.22, Confucius cited verbatim the judgment of Line 3 of the “Heng” 恒 hexagram in the *Yi* without naming either the hexagram or the work (Lou 2017: 380). Similarly, XUNZI did not mention the “Xiaoxu” 小畜 hexagram when he cited it although he did when he cited the “Xian” 咸 hexagram in the “Dalue” 大略 chapter (Wang 1997: 495, 498). The *Shi*, *Shu*, *Yi* enjoyed such privilege probably because they were venerated texts in the Zhou culture at least for those scholars who respected them. Warring States philosophers hardly referred to them except the followers of Confucius and, to a lesser degree, the Mohists (Brown 2013). Other than specific titles, citations might be prefaced with the generic heading “chuan yue” 傳曰 or “chuan yun” 傳云 (“as transmitted”), or a little more concrete expression such as “Xiayan yue” 夏諺曰 (“a popular saying in

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ing on the streets, composed the *Essential Meanings of the Laozi* 老子指歸 which expounded the philosophy of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. See Ban 2002: 72.3056.

<sup>86</sup>Roth argues: “there can be no doubt that a version of the material contained in the extant *Chuang Tzu* was at the court of Liu An.” See Roth 1991: 118.

Xia times said”) or “*Zhouyan yue*” 周諺曰 (“a popular saying in Zhou times said”). Indeed, this practice continued into the Han and remained unchanged until its end.

Suffice it to examine LU Jia 陸賈 (240 BCE–170 BCE) as an early Han example. In his *Xinyu* 新語 (New Memorials), he quoted from the *Shi* six times with “*Shi yue*” (詩曰) and “*Shi yun*” (詩云), the *Yi* thrice with “*Yi yue*” 易曰 (Wang 1986: 171), the *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 twice with “*Guliang zhuan yue*” (Wang 1986: 34, 124)<sup>87</sup> and “*chuan yue*” once. He also quoted one line (上德不德, the highest virtue is not virtuous) explicitly from the *Laozi* 老子 (chapter 38) once (Wang 1986: 168). It must be emphasized that LU was not quoting the legendary figure LAOZI; he was quoting from the eponymous work. In contrast, Confucius was quoted by his name Kongzi on two occasions, and what he said actually appears in our received *Analects*. In the “*Shenwei*” 慎微 chapter, Confucius was quoted as saying,

“The Way is not being practiced.” This means to say people were not able to practice the Way. Thus, he said to Yan Yuan, “Only you and I have the ability to go forward when employed and to stay out of sight when set aside.”

孔子曰道之不行也。言人不能行之。故謂顏淵曰用之則行，舍之則藏，唯我與爾有是夫 (Wang 1986: 93; Lau 1979: 151, 87; romanization converted to *pinyin*).

Here, LU Jia actually quoted Confucius verbatim twice (the statements in quotation marks). The first utterance comes from *Analects* 18.7 and the second from *Analects* 7.11. In the “*Siwu*” 思務 chapter, he quoted Confucius as saying:

“Follow the calendar of the Xia, ride in the carriage of the Yin, and wear the ceremonial cap of the Zhou, but as for music, adopt the *shao*. Banish the tunes of Zheng and keep plausible men at a distance.”

孔子曰行夏之時，乘殷之輅，服周之冕，樂則韶舞。放鄭聲，遠佞人 (Wang 1986: 170; Lau 1979: 133–134; romanization converted to *pinyin*. Lau emends *wu* 舞 to *wu* 武).

Again, Confucius was quoted verbatim. Given the customary practice of naming the title of the quoted work, it is incongruous to identify the quotation by the name of the speaker. The reason for this seeming incongruity might be threefold. First, the work that would become our received *Analects* did not yet acquire its title. Second, the quotations came from some independent units of text (thus without a title) in which Confucius was cited rather than a finished product; in other words, the work later titled *Analects* had yet to form as a corpus. Third, the quotations came from a work titled *Kongzi*, which later would be called *Lunyu* (*Analects*) instead.<sup>88</sup> However, the third possibility does not seem likely and until it can be confirmed, it is safe to conclude that LU Jia could only quote Confucius the person instead of a book.

We do not know when exactly the *Analects* became a book<sup>89</sup> but its title, in our current knowledge, first appeared in HAN Ying’s *Hanshi waizhuan* and the “*Fangji*”

<sup>87</sup> Due to textual corruption, the second quotation only mentions the title of *Guliang zhuan* without any content.

<sup>88</sup> Ann Cheng said: “Originally the work had been referred to as the *K’ung tzu* (Kongzi) 孔子, in the same way as writings of other masters of the Warring States period.” But she did not offer any evidence. See Cheng 1993: 315.

<sup>89</sup> Based on a comprehensive survey of thousands of extant sayings attributed to and stories about Confucius from Han times and earlier, Michael Hunter recently argues that the *Analects* was probably compiled in the Western Han period (206 BCE–9CE). See Hunter 2017 and 2018.

坊記 chapter of the *Liji* 禮記, which probably also dated to the early Han. Since LU Jia predated both of them, it is possible that he did not have a book titled *Analects* at his disposal.<sup>90</sup> It was probably not coincidental that the “Fangji” consists of thirty-nine chapters and each was a quotation from the Master (*ziyun* 子云), namely, Confucius. Within each quotation, other texts such as the *Shi* (14 times), *Shu* (1), *Gaozong* 高宗 (1), *Taishi* 大誓 (1), *Junchen* 君陳 (1), *Yi* (1), *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals, 3), *Lu Chunqiu* 魯春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Lu, 2) might be cited, and the *Lunyu* (1) was one of them. No doubt, only texts that would be venerated as “classics” or would-be “classics,” or works related to Confucius were cited. Also, the *Gaozong*, *Taishi*, *Junchen* would later be incorporated into the *Shangshu* 尚書 (namely, *Shu* in pre-Han times)<sup>91</sup> and since the *Shu* was separately quoted, it is likely that these three texts were not yet parts of it and existed independently when the “Fangji” was written or compiled. Thus, it makes sense that none of the thirty-nine quotations from the Master can be found in our received *Analects* as they were probably not parts of its contents. Hence, they were quoted from the Master, not the *Analects*.<sup>92</sup>

Like LU Jia, the *Huai’nanzi* also cited the *Shi* (21 times), *Shu* (2), *Zhou shu* 周書 (2), *Yi* (12), *Chunqiu* (*Gongyang zhuan*) 春秋公羊傳 (1), *Shenzi* 慎子 (1), and *Guanzi* (1), however, it quoted “Laozi” extensively, a total of fifty-six times (“Laozi yue” 老子曰) as a work and only on one other occasion referred to it as a person. In “Miucheng xun” 繆稱訓 chapter, it says: LAOZI studied with SHANG Rong and understood [the importance of] abiding by suppleness when he saw [the survival of] the tongue [after the teeth]” 老子學商容，見舌而知守柔矣 (Liu 1989: 337). Notably, LAOZI was quoted not for what he said but what he did, for his teaching invariably came from the work titled *Laozi*. The situation is the same with quotations from Confucius. Other than the numerous episodes that involved Confucius where he might engage in a conversation with others, he was quoted at least thrice for his teaching. The first one in the “Zhushu xun” 主術訓 chapter was

<sup>90</sup> LU Jia quoted the *Analects* (6.11) verbatim one more time without even mentioning the name of Confucius. He said: “Living in a mean dwelling on a bowlful of rice and a ladleful of water is a hardship most men would find intolerable, but Yan Hui [did] not allow this to affect his joy” (顏回一簞食，一瓢飲，在陋巷之中，人不堪其憂). See Wang 1986: 67; Lau 1979: 82.

<sup>91</sup> *Gaozong* would be called “Gaozong rongri” 高宗彤日 and included in the documents allegedly from the Shang dynasty (*Shangshu* 尚書) while *Taishi* and *Junchen* would constitute parts of the documents allegedly from the Zhou dynasty (*Zhoushu* 周書).

<sup>92</sup> LU Jia quoted Confucius two more times as follows: In the “Wuwei” 無為 chapter, Confucius said: “Change [people’s] habits and alter [their] customs” 孔子曰移風易俗 (Wang 1986: 67). And in the “Shenwei” chapter, Confucius said: “[The ancient kings] had a perfect virtue and an essential way to act in accord with All under Heaven” 孔子曰有至德要道以順天下 (Wang 1986: 98). Both quotations can be found in the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of Filial Devotion) where the sayings came from the mouth of Confucius. However, the text was already given the title in Warring States times and it was quoted by the title in the “Chawei” 察微 chapter of Book 16 (Examination on Prescience 先識覽) in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, which is dated to 239 BCE (Chen 2002: 12.1354; Knoblock and Riegel, 2000: 395). The section on “Examinations” was probably composed later. Given the difficulty of circulation of texts and the social chaos erupted with collapse of the Qin empire, it is possible that LU Jia did not have access to the *Xiaojing* as a corpus with a title.

a verbatim quotation from parts of *Analepts* 13.6 (Liu 1989: 297; Lau 1979: 119) and the second one was also a verbatim quotation from *Analepts* 9.30 (Liu 1989: 444 Lau 1979: 100) in the “Fanlun xun” 汎論訓 chapter. The third quotation appears in the “Taizu xun” 泰族訓 chapter and it came from a source unknown today (Liu 1989: 677).<sup>93</sup> Since the *Analepts* probably did not yet exist in book form with a title, the compiler of the *Huai’nanzi* could only quote Confucius by his name. Finally, transmitted sayings appear only once (“Miucheng xun”) in the entire book of *Huai’nanzi* (Liu 1989: 335), and this suggests that the eclectic work cited mostly from written works with a title. Interestingly, it quoted from a “transmitted book” (*chuanshu* 傳書) in the “Xiuwu xun” 修務訓 chapter (Liu 1989: 634) and this reveals that the compiler of the *Huai’nanzi* did distinguish transmitted words from transmitted writings. Given the customary practice of quoting from texts in the early Han, the singular citation from “Zhuangzi” in the “Daoying xun” chapter, in all likelihood, should refer to the work attributed to him rather than ZHUANG Zhou himself. After all, the citation was not uttered by the character ZHUANGZI in the “Xiaoyao you” chapter although he did appear and speak at the end. Thus, the *Huai’nanzi* was not quoting a character named ZHUANGZI in the chapter but a corpus under his name instead. If “Confucius” was considered the “author” of the quotation from the *Analepts* (13.6) in the *Huai’nanzi*, so would be ZHUANGZI of the exceptional citation from the “Xiaoyao you” chapter. Since LAO-ZHUANG was identified as a pair of philosophical twins in the anthology, it only makes sense that Master ZHUANG also had a corpus with his own signature as did LAOZI. However, it remains unclear whether the title came with the preexisting corpus or was added by the Huai’nan court retainers, if they indeed compiled the *Zhuangzi*. Even if the title was original to the corpus, this does not necessarily mean that the Huai’nan court retainers considered Master ZHUANG to be its sole author. Moreover, there is still no evidence to prove that there were chapter divisions or even chapter titles in this corpus.<sup>94</sup> In sum, the *Huai’nanzi* citation of the “Xiaoyao you” chapter may well betray the fact that not only was *Zhuangzi* the title of the corpus which contained it but ZHUANGZI was, at least, also considered its partial author.

<sup>93</sup> There are other quotations from our *Analepts* without mentioning its title or the Master. See, for example, the quotation from *Analepts* 13.18 in Liu 1989: 442.

<sup>94</sup> Roth claims that “phrases from six of the ‘Inner’ Chapters are also found in the *Huai’nanzi*” and specifically, he lists *xiaoyao*, *qiwu* (which Roth unjustifiably equates with *qisu* 齊俗), *yangsheng*, *renjian*, *dazong*, *diwang* (Roth 1991: 114–115; romanization converted to pinyin). He assumes either that before the Huai’nan retainers compiled the *Zhuangzi* (a position he argues for), at least parts of the mass of *Zhuangzi* texts already existed as separate chapters with their titles, or that the retainers added the titles to the chapters, which might already exist as such or were differentiated at the time of compilation. The first assumption remains to be substantiated.

## 9 A Note on Authorship

But what did authorship mean to book compilers in the early Han? Perhaps it was as simple as it appeared, namely, the name attached to a work was meant to label it in distinction from other works that were similarly labeled; it does not necessarily mean that the person bearing that name actually composed the work, much less being its sole author. For instance, SIMA Qian said: “When I read the writings of Confucius, I imagined how he was as a person” 余讀孔氏書，想見其為人 (Sima 1963: 1947). Clearly, he did not mean to say Confucius was the author of the writings he perused. Based on the *Shiji*, we know the archivist read the *Analects*, among other works associated with Confucius such as *Zaiyu wen Wudi de* 宰予問五帝德 and *Dixixing* 帝繫姓. The “writings of Confucius” in question most probably referred to the *Analects*, which the archivist quoted extensively in his biography of Confucius, but he knew the Master was not the author of the *Analects*.

Similarly, SIMA Qian also said: “I read Guan [Zhong]’s writings on [the chapters of] “Mumin,” “Shangao,” “Chengma,” “Jiufu” and the *Annals of Yanzi* and [realized that] how detailed their expositions were. Having read their writings, I wanted to examine their deeds and arrayed what had been transmitted about them. As many people in our time had their writings, I therefore do not discuss them, but instead assemble anecdotes about them that might not be well known” 吾讀管氏牧民、山高、乘馬、輕重、九府，及晏子春秋，詳哉其言之也。既見其著書，欲觀其行事，故次其傳。至其書，世多有之，是以不論，論其軼事 (Sima 1963: 2.62.2136).<sup>95</sup> However, in our received *Guanzi* numerous chapters contain dialogues between “Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 and GUANZI, and since GUAN Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 BCE) predeceased Duke Huan (d. 643 BCE), he could not have known his lord’s posthumous title (Huan).<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the work titled *Guanzi* in eighty-six *pian* in the Han imperial library contained five chapters of “explanations” (解) of other chapters within the same corpus. Clearly, they could not have come from the hands of GUAN Zhong. As Allyn Rickett observes, “the present text contains a wide mixture of material written by a number of unnamed writers over a long period of time.

<sup>95</sup> Here, the archivist explicitly stated that he aimed at recounting the historical details of GUAN Zhong and YAN Ying rather than their philosophy—the same preference he had for documenting the life of ZHUANG Zhou.

<sup>96</sup> One may argue that later compilers replaced Duke Huan’s name with his posthumous title but we do not have any hard evidence for that. On the other hand, the “Yaolue” 要略 chapter of the *Huai’nanzi* did not ascribe the authorship of the *Guanzi* (管子之書) to GUAN Zhong himself; rather, it attributed the writings to the need to assist the historic mission of Duke Huan of Qi to maintain the political order of All under Heaven on behalf of the Son of Heaven. Clearly, personal authorship was not the issue. About the *Annals of Yanzi*, the author(s) of the chapter only specified Yanzi’s remonstrations with Duke Jing 景 of Qi, and the “Yaolue” authors did not mention any book title, let alone its authorship. However, two officials LIANGQIU Ju 梁丘據 and ZIJIA Kuai 子家嚙 were mentioned who also counselled the Duke regularly. The former appeared in our received *Yanzi* frequently and in this peculiar sense shared the “authorship” with *Yanzi*. Similarly, the author(s) of the “Yaolue” elaborated the aims of the *Huai’nanzi*, which was called “Liu’s Writings” 劉氏之書 rather than by a title, knowing the Prince did not actually compose the work. See Liu 1989: 710–711.



Some chapters may date from as early as the fifth century B.C., while others clearly belong to the early Han period, perhaps as late as the middle of the first century B.C.” (Rickett 1993: 244). Likewise, the *Annals of Yanzi* recounts many events that happened only after his death. Both cases show that GUAN Zhong and YANZI could not be the (sole) author of the work attributed to them. Thus, even though SIMA Qian said he had read their writings (見其著書), he did not mean to say that GUAN Zhong and YANZI actually composed them, at least not their entirety.<sup>97</sup> In the “Bibliographic Treatise” of the *Hanshu*, a work titled *Gongsun Gu* 公孫固 in one *pian* of eighteen sections was listed. BAN Gu remarked that it was GONGSUN Gu’s replies to the questions on governance raised by Duke Min 閔 (d. 284 BCE) of Qi when he lost his state (Ban 2002: 6.30.1725). The small size of the work suggests that no late accretions were added to it. Perhaps in this regard, GONGSUN Gu could be properly considered as the author of that text in our conventional sense, even though, according to SIMA Qian, he only “assembled relevant materials from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* to compose his work” 摭摭春秋之文以著書 (Sima 1963: 1.14.510).

It is evident that SIMA Qian was aware of the accretional nature of many texts from pre-Han times and indeed, he himself explained the composition of one such example. In the “Bibliographic Treatise” of the *Han History*, there listed a work titled *Rules of Commander-in-chief in Military Rites* 軍禮司馬法 in 155 *pian* without authorial attribution (Ban 2002: 6.30.1709). Yet, SIMA Qian offered a valuable clue. According to the “Arrayed Tradition of Sima Rangju” 司馬穰苴列傳 in the *Shiji*, Rangju was a descendant of the aristocratic clan of Tian Wan 田完 in the state of Qi, and he was appointed General on the recommendation of YAN Ying 晏嬰 (aka YANZI) during the reign of Duke Jing when the Qi was under the attack of the states of Jin 晉 and YAN 燕. He defeated the enemies and was thereby honored with title of Commander-in-chief 大司馬. Later on, King Wei 威王 employed his army in accordance with the rules of SIMA Rangju and exerted its power on the battlefield. As a result, feudal vassals came to pay their tribute to Qi. King Wei then had his counsellors re-examine the text of the *Military Art of the Commander* from former times and appended the rules of SIMA Rangju to it, and the final product was given the title of *Military Art of Sima Rangju* 司馬穰苴兵法 (Sima 1963: 7.64.2160). Thus, SIMA Rangju became the “author” of the composite text, similar to the ascription of authorship to GONGSUN Gu. In the archivist’s judgment, SIMA Rangju was able to expound the military art of former ages (Sima 1963: 10.70.3313), and considered him an interpreter of the military art of commanders of former times. Thus, under the fabric of military art and perhaps in this case, the common official title of commander, different expositions of the subject matter by different writers and interpreters could be compiled together to constitute one unitary if not homogenous textual corpus. In short, SIMA Qian would typically attribute a work to a person who usually initiated its formation with or without the intention to write a book, and he

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of the composition and dating of the *Annals of Yanzi*, see Durrant 1993.



did not necessarily have the idea of authorship in mind (Cf. Kern 2015: 351, 353, 356, 361–362).<sup>98</sup>

Indeed, this was also one of the strategies that LIU Xiang employed in compiling the texts in the imperial library. One such example was a text titled *Taigong* 太公 in 237 *pian* under the Daoist school (道家). BAN Gu remarked that Taigong (Grand Lord) was called Lǚ Wang 呂望 who was the (military) advisor of King Wen 文 and King Wu 武 of the Zhou dynasty and that this unusually large corpus might include additions by people in recent times (i.e., Han times) who also practiced the art originated with TAIGONG (Ban 2002: 6.30.1729). Another interesting example is the *Zhanguo ce* (戰國策, *Intrigues of the Warring States*), which was redacted with a new title from six distinctive yet similar texts with their own titles on and about persuasion by Warring States strategists.<sup>99</sup> In this case, no authorial attribution was made.

In the early Han, it was common to attribute to a person a composite text such as the *Military Art of the Commander* and the *Intrigues* if no title that might capture its essence could be found. Hence, the *Laozi* was titled thus rather than *Daode jing* 道德經 in the “Bibliographic Treatise” of the *Hanshu*; in fact, no one in Han times seemed to have called the little book “*Daode jing*” even though it was divided into two sections called “De” 德 and “Dao” 道 respectively in the Mawangdui silk manuscript *Laozi* B.<sup>100</sup> Even when a text had its own title, it could be replaced with a new one represented by its supposed author. Thus, LIU Xiang renamed the corpus *Huai’nan* instead of its original title *Honglie* 鴻烈 (Liu 1989: 706). LU Jia’s *Xinyu*, discussed above, was treated in a similar way. In his biography in both the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*, his work was mentioned by its title and was recorded as having twelve *pian* (Sima 1963: 8.97.2699; Ban 2002: 7.43.2113). Yet, the title was changed eponymously to *Lu Jia* and its size grew to become twenty-three *pian* in the “Bibliographic Treatise” (Ban 2002: 6.30.1726). Evidently, LU Jia’s other non-poetic writings were added to the *Xinyu* and the original title became inappropriate.<sup>101</sup> Still, there is one more example with KUAI Tong 蒯通, who was a persuader himself during the

<sup>98</sup> Recently, Martin Kern considered “the vast majority of early Chinese texts to be circumscribed anthologies or repertoires of material that were not ‘written up’ (in acts of individual authorship) but rather ‘edited down’ (in processes of selection) into the books we now have, a process that entirely dissolves the notion of individual authorship in favor of the roles of compilers and editors” (Kern 2015: 101-4-5: 337). He made a convincing argument for his case. Yet, he appeals: “In thinking about the early ‘Masters,’ we also must once and for all abandon the traditional approach that treats the ‘Masters’ as the personal authors of these eponymous texts. To some extent, this requires going against the accounts in the *Shiji* where such authorship is claimed in routine fashion” (Kern 2015: 101-4-5: 336). Perhaps we need to re-examine if our conventional understanding of authorship means the same to SIMA Qian’s in the first place. Indeed, Kern admits that “There is a particular mode of composition that seems not at all tied to individual authorship but to the compilation and recompilation of existing materials, with only limited additions by the compiler himself” (Kern 2015: 356).

<sup>99</sup> On the textual history of the *Intrigues*, see Tsien 1993.

<sup>100</sup> The *Laozi* was called *Daode jing* instead in the *Accounts of the Transcendents* 列仙傳, which was attributed to LIU Xiang but not listed in the “Bibliographic Treatise.” However, the attribution is questionable. See Schipper and Verellren 2004: 114.

<sup>101</sup> LU Jia had another work titled *Rhapsodies of Lu Jia* 陸賈賦 in three *pian* listed under the category of Poetry and Rhapsodies 詩賦 in the “Bibliographic Treatise.” See Ban 2002: 6.30.1748.

interregnum after the Qin empire was overthrown. In his biography in the *Hanshu*, we are told that he composed a book titled *Juanyong* 雋永 in eighty-one sections (*shou* 首) which consisted of his comments on the persuaders' strategies of disputation in Warring States times and his own insights on the subject matter (Ban 2002: 7.45.2167). But when his work was classified under the Persuaders 縱橫家 in the "Bibliographic Treatise," it was called *Kuaizi* 蒯子 (in five *pian*) instead (Ban 2002: 6.30.1739). KUAI Tong was the legitimate author of the *Juanyong*, though parts of it were built upon earlier sources, but for this apparent reason, LIU Xiang attributed them to him as well and re-titled his work under his name—a similar act SIMA Qian had performed with the work of GONGSUN Gu.

It is clear, then, that essentially, when people in the Han attributed a text to an author, they believed with varying degrees of certainty or even total lack thereof, that he might have something to do with the composition of the text but more importantly, they were concerned about the doctrine or philosophy espoused by him; his name thus represented, as it were, the trademark for his thought. And his thought could be further developed by his followers who might contribute their ideas to the original corpus, or conversely, it itself might have been inspired by similar thinking from earlier times, and for this reason was added to works that contained them either by himself or later compilers. This explains why most of the texts, apart from the works listed under the Six Classics (六藝), were titled by a person's name, whether he was real or legendary. It was never in the plural or co-authored as the single author often implied multiple authorship.<sup>102</sup> Thus, whether it was the Huai'nan court authors or SIMA Qian, when they called a work by the title of *Huai'nanzi* or *Zhuangzi*, they did not necessarily mean Prince Huai'nan or ZHUANGZI alone wrote it all if either did actually contribute to it in any way.

## 10 Conclusion

There is no empirical evidence to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that ZHUANG Zhou personally composed any particular part of our received version of the *Zhuangzi*. SIMA Qian read a collection of writings attributed to ZHUANG Zhou in more than one hundred thousand words, but this does not imply that he believed the

<sup>102</sup>There might be two exceptions. In the "Bibliographic Treatise" of the *Hanshu*, a work entitled *Huai'nan wang qunchen fu* 淮南王群臣賦 (Rhapsodies by the Ministers of Prince Huai'nan) in forty-four *pian* and another called *Changsha wang qunchen fu* 長沙王群臣賦 (Rhapsodies by the Ministers of Prince Changsha) in three *pian* were listed under the category of "Rhapsody" (*fu* 賦) [Ban 2002: 6.30.1747, 1750]. Clearly, multiple authors were involved in both works. While unusual, the two titles were certainly not original to the works, and the attribution was not keen on the notion of authorship as we understand it. On the other hand, the *Gaozu zhuan* 高祖傳 in thirteen *pian* under the category of "Ru" (儒) clearly shows that the work was attributed only to Emperor Gaozu himself even though it consisted of the discussions about the ancient past between the emperor and his ministers, as well as his various edicts (Ban 2002: 6.30.1726). This, of course, fits the norm of ascribing "authorship" in the early Han.

lacquer-tree park keeper had actually written every single word in it. While we do not know if the collection had a title, it was likely divided into various chapters but we do not know how many it contained. Nor is it clear if the chapters were divided into different clusters. Indeed, they were probably not (see below). In his account of ZHUANG Zhou, the archivist mentioned three chapters by their titles (Chs. 31, 29, 10) apparently in reverse from the order in our received *Zhuangzi*, quoted from two others (Chs. 32, 17), borrowed from one (Ch. 27) and alluded to yet another (Ch. 33).<sup>103</sup> This may suggest that his version or at least the placement of the chapters in it might be different from ours.<sup>104</sup> While none of the chapters belongs to the Inner Chapters, given the analysis above, it seems certain that at least parts of them were included in the archivist's version. The Han imperial version contained at least the two divisions of inner chapters and outer chapters but we do not know whether it was identical to SIMA Qian's version or corresponded to the two chapter divisions in GUO Xiang's 33-chapter recension, although it is certain that its "Qiwulun" chapter belonged to its inner chapters. The division of inner and outer chapters might be significant. In the "Bibliographic Treatise," there are four types of work that may be classified into inner and outer sections (Table 3.4).

Of these few works, the grouping of chapters in medical texts seems to make good sense. Unfortunately, only the *Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor* survives today and it consists of eighty-two theoretical discourses on cosmological groundings for human microcosm, various aspects of the human body, and pathology. It is possible that the *Outer Classic* might be more practically oriented but this is pure speculation.<sup>105</sup> The *Bo shi* (Master Bo) text even included a separate group of auxiliary chapters called *pangpian* 旁篇; they were presumably of miscellaneous nature. The classification of HAN Ying's works into four kinds is also sensible as they were different in nature. More importantly, they were stand-alone texts in their own right. The miscellaneous writings of Prince Huai'nan were catalogued under four different bibliographical categories for similar considerations. The massive corpus, *Taigong*, in 237 *pian* attributed to Lü Shang was evidently classified by content but not distributed under different bibliographical categories.

No chapter division was indicated for the *Yanzi* in eight *pian* but the first six *pian* and the last two *pian* are respectively classified as inner chapters (*neipian* 內篇) and outer [chapters] (*wai* 外) in our received text today. As Stephen Durrant observes, "The Outer *pian* contain variants of items found in the 'Inner' *pian* along with other items that are of a strong anti-Confucian tone. Although the last two *pian* are termed

<sup>103</sup> As analyzed above, there are many more citations of and references to the *Zhuangzi* in the *Shiji* and they might not be confined to the non-Inner Chapters.

<sup>104</sup> In his account of HAN Fei, SIMA Qian also mentioned five chapter titles (孤憤、五蠹、內外儲、說林、說難) when he referred to his work but they were listed in random order. He did not say if the corpus had a title. See Sima 1963: 7.63.2147.

<sup>105</sup> Nathan Sivin has noted: "No evidence has come to light that enables a choice between the various senses of 'inner' and 'outer' in Han book titles" and the speculation about the criteria for the distinction between the *Huangdi neijing* and *waijing* should not be answered by speculation (Sivin 1993: 196–197).

**Table 3.4** Works that contained multiple chapter divisions in “Bibliographic Treatise” of the *Han History*

Nature of text in the treatise	Texts					
	Inner/size	Outer/size	Middle/ auxiliary/ size			
Six Arts (Odes)	<i>Hanshi neizhuan</i> 4 <i>pian</i> 韓詩內傳 (Inner Commentary on Han's Odes)	<i>Hanshi waizhuan</i> 6 <i>pian</i> 韓詩外傳 (Outer Commentary on Han's Odes)		<i>Han gu</i> 36 <i>pian</i> 韓故 (Han's Glosses)	<i>Han shuo</i> 41 <i>pian</i> 韓說 (Han's Elaborations)	
Various masters/Six Arts	<i>Huai'nan nei</i> 21 <i>pian</i> 淮南內 (Inner <i>Huai'nan</i> ) listed under “Zajia” 雜家 (Eclectics)	<i>Huai'nan wai</i> 23 <i>pian</i> 淮南外 (Outer <i>Huai'nan</i> ) listed under “Zajia” 雜家 (Eclectics)		<i>Huai'nan daolun</i> 2 <i>pian</i> 淮南道訓 ( <i>Huai'nan</i> on Dao) listed under <i>Yi</i> (Changes)	<i>Huai'nan fu</i> 82 <i>pian</i> 淮南王賦 (Rhapsodies of Prince <i>Huai'nan</i> )  <i>Huai'nan qunchen fu</i> 44 <i>pian</i> 淮南王群臣賦 (Rhapsodies of Prince <i>Huai'nan</i> 's Officials)  <i>Huai'nan geshi</i> 4 <i>pian</i> 淮南歌詩 (Songs of Prince <i>Huai'nan</i> ) listed under <i>Shi fu</i> 詩賦 (Poetry and Rhapsodies)	<i>Huai'nan zazixing</i> 19 <i>juan</i> (scrolls) 淮南雜子星 ( <i>Huai'nan</i> ) Miscellaneous Constellations) listed under Astronomy 天文
“Daoist”	<i>Taigong</i> 237 <i>pian</i> 太公			<i>Strategies</i> 謀 81 <i>pian</i> Theories 言 71 <i>pian</i> Art of War 兵 85 <i>pian</i>		

Nature of text in the treatise	Texts			Middle/ auxiliary/ size				
	Inner/size	Outer/size						
“Confucian”	Inner/size <i>Yanzi</i> * 8 <i>pian</i> 晏子							
	<i>Zhuangzi</i> * 52 <i>pian</i>							
Medical	<i>Huangdi neijing</i> 18 <i>pian</i> 黃帝內經 (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor)	<i>Huangdi waijing</i> 39 <i>pian</i> 黃帝外經 (Outer Classic of the Yellow Emperor)						
	<i>Bianque neijing</i> 9 <i>pian</i> 扁鵲內經 (Bianque’s Inner Classic)	<i>Bianque waijing</i> 12 <i>pian</i> 扁鵲外 經 (Bianque’s Outer Classic)						
	<i>Bo shi neijing</i> 38 <i>pian</i> 白氏內經	<i>Bo shi waijing</i> 36 <i>pian</i> 白氏外經	<i>Bo shi pangpian</i> 25 <i>pian</i> 白氏旁篇					

simply ‘Outer’, the six ‘Inner’ *pian* carry further designations, i.e. *jian* 諫 1 and 2; *wen* 問 1 and 2; and *za* 雜 1 and 2. The arrangement of the content of each of the ‘Inner’ *pian* appears to be arbitrary, but within the book as a whole chapters tend to be arranged according to general topic; i.e., remonstrances aimed at the same type of indiscretion on the part of the Duke are placed together” (Durrant 1993: 483; romanization converted to *pinyin*). This synopsis is sufficient for us to appreciate the editor’s decision to classify the chapters into different divisions even if the distinction between inner and outer is not always clear-cut. Still, LIU Xiang’s own explanation in his Preface to the *Yanzi* gives us the best insight. He said:

6 *pian* of this book are all loyal remonstrations against a ruler; the composition is worthy of respect, the principles worthy of emulation. In all cases these agree with the doctrine of the Six Classics. In addition, there are repetitions with rather different phraseology which I dared not overlook and which have been further arranged in 1 *pian*. There are also those parts which disagree somewhat with the learning of the Classics, as if they were not the words of Yan Zi. I suspect that they were produced by sophists of a later age, but again I did not dare to abandon them and have arranged them in 1 *pian* (Durrant 1993: 484; romanization converted to *pinyin*)

Obviously, LIU’s editorial work was by no means arbitrary; he took into consideration thematic coherence (on remonstrance), the art of composition (文章), phraseology (文辭), and underlying philosophy (義理) in order to determine the integrity and authenticity of each chapter before he included and classified them into the final work. It is significant that LIU respected the miscellaneous contents of the *Yanzi* and accommodated them properly.

We have good reason to believe that LIU Xiang was equally meticulous with his treatment of the *Zhuangzi*, though it does not mean that he aimed at preserving its “original” condition as a text. Like the *Yanzi*, the “Bibliographic Treatise” did not indicate the internal structure of the *Zhuangzi*, but, as BAN Gu already revealed, it was at least divided into inner chapters and outer chapters. As noted above, there was a subdivision designated *za* 雜 (mixed) within the inner chapters of the *Yanzi*; it contained sixty anecdotes of about 7,200 words equally distributed in two groups called “shang” 上 (upper) and “xia” 下 (lower). With this precedent, it is not impossible that the imperial *Zhuangzi* also contained a division of mixed chapters for whatever reason. Yet, this was probably not the case with SIMA Qian’s copy as it was perhaps not yet edited. Moreover, in recording the writings of the protagonists in their biographies, SIMA Qian mentioned specifically the inner and outer divisions only in the case of HAN Fei’s “Inner and Outer Collections” 內外儲 (Sima 1963: 7.63.2147)<sup>106</sup> and HAN Ying’s *Hanshi neizhuan* and *Hanshi waizhuan* (Sima 1963: 10.121.3124).<sup>107</sup> In both cases, the inner-outer distinction was original to the works. In the former, the inner and outer sections together formed one single chapter in our received version of the *Hanfeizi* and they were divided merely for convenience because of the enormous size of the chapter, while in the latter, the *Inner Commentary* and the *Outer Commentary* were actually two different books. In this light, we

<sup>106</sup> In fact, in our received version, the Inner section is further divided into upper 上 and lower 下 while the Outer section is divided into left 左 and right 右, which are subdivided into upper and lower.

<sup>107</sup> The situation is true of BAN Gu’s record as well (Ban 2202: 11.88.2613), but he only mentioned the case of HAN Ying.

would expect that the archivist would have indicated the inner-outer division in the *Zhuangzi* at his disposal if that were in fact its internal structure. However, one common feature seems to stand out in the inner-outer division in the *Yanzi* and our received *Zhuangzi*, namely, the outer *pian* contains items of strong anti-Confucian tone and variants of anecdotes in the inner *pian*. This might well be true of the various versions of the *Zhuangzi* in Han times. If so, the several chapters mentioned by the Grand Archivist probably belonged to the outer chapters as well.

The Inner Chapters were available to HAN Ying and the authors of the Huai'nan court. In fact, the Huai'nan authors had access to all but one (Ch. 30) of the chapters in our *Zhuangzi*. As the Prince was born in 179 BCE and some of his protégés must have been at least one generation older than he was, this means they were born around the collapse of the Qin dynasty and had the opportunity of acquiring and studying the *Zhuangzi* texts in their prime years. Naturally, their texts must have come from the Warring States period. Effectively, we can be certain that the Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, and Mixed Chapters all existed before the Han dynasty. The material evidence for the existence of the Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, and Mixed Chapters might have come from the bamboo-strip *Zhuangzi* excavated in Fuyang and Zhangjiashan. The Fuyang find was dated to around 165 BCE, and about seventy years before its entombment, in 213 BCE, the First Emperor issued a ban on the possession of books and book writing was then presumably out of the question. In all likelihood, the Fuyang *Zhuangzi* was written no later than that year and this means that the Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, and Mixed Chapters probably existed in the Warring States period. It remains to be proved that all these chapters were indeed classified into a tripartite structure as our received *Zhuangzi*, and if so, the classification was identical as well. While the Huai'nan *Zhuangzi* might have the title, we do not know if it was true of the Fuyang version as well. Regardless, the title does not mean ZHUANG Zhou was the sole author of the text.

The traditional view that ZHUANG Zhou wrote the Inner Chapters but not the Outer and Mixed Chapters in our received *Zhuangzi* lacks hard evidence. A radical skeptic may question if he actually composed *all* of the seven Inner Chapters.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, SIMA Qian's insights about ZHUANG Zhou's writing style and iconoclastic character, in essence, pronounced that he was a real person as XUNZI believed he was in the Warring States. For the archivist, there was a character in his *Zhuangzi* corpus who breathed life into it and defined its ingenious philosophy and idiosyncratic expression. His name was ZHUANG Zhou. Careful examination may help us differentiate the individual sections if not the chapters of the *Zhuangzi* corpus in terms of stylistics, terminology, tropes, unrestrained expressions of the self-worth as well as the philosophy that nurtures them.<sup>109</sup> But this is not hard science or, strictly speaking, not even philosophy per se.

<sup>108</sup> In his *Études sur Tchouang-tseu*, François Billeter argues that the inner chapters were "the work of ZHUANGZI and other anonymous authors, the geniuses of whom were similar to his own, who shared his vision of things and who expressed themselves in the same manner as him." Quoted in French in Klein 2011: 310, n.26; translation mine.

<sup>109</sup> The author of the "Tianxia" chapter of the *Zhuangzi* evidently noticed the unique literary style of the writings attributed to him. SIMA Qian might have been inspired by this insight in the chapter.



As mentioned above, when SIMA Qian read the writings of Confucius, he imagined how the Master was as a person. Likewise, his account of ZHUANG Zhou tells us he also tried to visualize what kind of person ZHUANGZI was. Perhaps in this peculiar sense, he would entertain a notion of authorship that was meaningful to him as an archivist. Readers familiar with the poignant accounts of many other memorable figures in his *Shiji*, prominent or humble alike, would appreciate the sensitive and vivid portrait he painted for the reclusive yet flamboyant writer-cum-thinker, who managed to transcend not only the futile squabbles over fluid truths and the worthless pursuits of fame and profit in his time, but also the very concept of time itself and his identity in it. Perhaps for a different reason, GUO Xiang also imagined the ZHUANGZI who mesmerized the intellectual elite in the Wei-Jin period and became their model for a life of self-fulfilment. His insights guided him to excise his base-text(s) of the *Zhuangzi* and created his own redaction with a creative commentary whose philosophical vision remains influential even until today. However, it would be misleading to track down the “original” *Zhuangzi* that was believed to be authored by ZHUANG Zhou in the footsteps of GUO Xiang. For us modern analysts, it is probably an impossible mission to ascertain the authorship of the *Zhuangzi* given our current knowledge; but the Fuyang find gives us tremendous hope. Our chances of success may improve when new excavated texts from the Warring States come to see the light in the future. Meanwhile, let us follow Master ZHUANG’s advice: “Men all pay homage to what understanding understands, but no one understands enough to rely upon what understanding does not understand and thereby come to understand. Can we call this anything but great perplexity” 人皆尊其知之所知，而莫知恃其知之所不知而後知，可不謂大疑乎 (Guo 1985: 905; Watson 1968: 288)? Master ZHUANG was contemplating the mysteries of his life and the myriad things integral to it. Our task is much more modest: figure out how the corpus bearing his name came to be, with impartiality, receptiveness, and humility.

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# Chapter 4

## The *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 as Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*



Scott Cook

### 1 Introduction

At the end of a chapter that effectively lays forth the entire work's central political message and purpose (“Bu er” 不二), the *Lüshi chunqiu* makes oblique reference to a passage that would eventually become one of the most famous of all in an earlier assemblage of writings—those which would ultimately be included in the work collectively known as the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>1</sup> After giving a brief accounting of the divergent points of emphasis held by each of the Chunqiu- and Zhanguo-period philosophical masters, the chapter immediately goes on to extol the importance of unity for effective governance and a secure social order: “To even out the myriad differences, so that

<sup>1</sup>Though the *Zhuangzi* did not realize its current form until the time of Guo Xiang 郭象 (died 312 AD), most, if not all of its “chapters” date from Warring States times, and there is little reason to doubt that some sort of assemblage of individual texts closely associated with Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (ca. 365–285 BC) and his followers—precursor to the transmitted *Zhuangzi*—was available to the authors/editors of the *Lüshi chunqiu* as writings representative of Zhuang Zi's philosophical lineage (see also note 2 below). For convenience, I will occasionally use the term “*Zhuangzi*” below to loosely refer to such an early assemblage of texts, but the reader should remain aware that we are not using the term here to refer specifically to the thirty-three chapter work that has been transmitted to us.

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An earlier version of this paper was first presented on November 23, 2013, as part of the Chinese Religions Group and Daoist Studies Group panel “Submerged Readings of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 – An Exercise in Rescuing and Retrieving Voices Mostly Disregarded in the Contemporary Academic Discourse,” at the 2013 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, held on November 23–26, 2013, in Baltimore, Maryland.

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the foolish and wise, artful and clumsy, are able to exhaust their individual capabilities, as if they all emerged from a single hollow—who but the sage is capable of this?” 夫能齊萬不同，愚智工拙，皆盡力竭能，如出乎一穴者，其唯聖人矣乎！(Xu 2009: 468). The lines carry an explicitly political focus: all schools of thought will be welcome and necessary contributors to the *Lüshi chunqiu*’s vision for the newly emerging empire, but all contention among them must be ameliorated, and their voices must be harmonized into a comprehensive and unitary expression in the name of political order and stability.

The original lines—at least as we have them in the “Qiwulun” 齊物論 chapter of the received *Zhuangzi*—carry no political message of this sort. The “myriad differences” and the myriad “hollows” through which these differences find vocal expression may certainly be seen, at least in part, as analogies for the contentious voices of philosophical and political disputation, but the “sage” in question achieves his “evening out” of the differences in an entirely different sense. He is not a political leader who consciously unifies difference through an all-inclusive act of literary compromise, but rather one who, through the simple act of self-forgetting, comes to realize the emptiness of all claims to philosophical truth, all of which are ultimately silenced once the “wind” that sounds them passes by. The *Lüshi chunqiu* thus borrows one of the most powerful and compelling images of the *Zhuangzi*, but does so selectively, and in the process places it in an entirely different context and puts it in the service of ends that should rightfully have been precluded by a full embrace of its original message.

The *Lüshi chunqiu* does not take the form of a commentary, nor was it in any ordinary sense of the word intended as such, whether for the *Zhuangzi* or for any other of the texts from which it generously borrows and finds cause to amend. It does, however, fulfill many of the same functions that later commentaries would, which is to say that it employs prior texts with some degree of authoritative pedigree in such a manner as to advance a particular political agenda, placing the text in the service of its own ends at the same time that it pays homage to it. The *Zhuangzi* (or the individual texts that would eventually constitute it) formed an important source for the *Lüshi chunqiu*, which cites it both explicitly and implicitly on a number of occasions, in each and every case subtly remolding its wording or context so as to give it new life as a textual agent for Lü Buwei’s 呂不韋 (ca. 290–235 BC) grand political vision for the empire. Through a close reading of such passages within their new authorial context, this paper will explore the precise manner in which the *Lüshi chunqiu* goes about utilizing and creatively reinterpreting the *Zhuangzi*, and in the process establishing a model for a long tradition of Chinese commentarial writing that was, at the time, very much still in its infancy.

While the focus of this paper is thus perhaps more on the *Lüshi chunqiu* than on the *Zhuangzi* itself, it nonetheless aims to give the reader a better understanding of the latter by highlighting the differences between the two works’ treatment of the same anecdotes and images within distinctly divergent argumentative contexts. There are many hermeneutical lenses by which to decipher the *Zhuangzi*, and by taking stock of how one early compilation employed passages from the work through its own interpretive framework, we are only made better aware of the types



of potential biases and presuppositions we may otherwise bring in to our own individual readings of the work.

## 2 *Zhuangzi* and the *Lüshi chunqiu*

There are in fact only two explicit references to Zhuang Zi in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, both of which cite him—or perhaps an early form of the work associated with him—by the name of “Zhuang Zi” 莊子, or “Master Zhuang,” as opposed to referring to him by his full name of “Zhuang Zhou” 莊周.<sup>2</sup> The first of these comes from the “Qu you” 去尤 chapter of the “You shi lan” 有始覽 section of the *Lüshi chunqiu*:

魯有惡者，其父出而見商咄，反而告其鄰曰：「商咄不若吾子矣。」且其子至惡也，商咄至美也。彼以至美不如至惡，尤乎愛也。故知美之惡，知惡之美，然後能知美惡矣。莊子曰：「以瓦投者翔，以鉤投者戰，以黃金投者殆。其祥一也，而有所殆者，必外有所重者也。外有所重者，泄蓋內掘。」魯人可謂外有重矣。(Xu 2009: 290–91)

In Lu, there was an ugly man. His father went out one day and came across Shang Duo, and upon his return told his neighbor: “Shang Duo is inferior [in looks] to my son.” Now his son was the ugliest of men, whereas Shang Duo was the handsomest. That he thought the handsomest of men to be inferior [in looks] to the ugliest was because he was blinded by love [for his son].

Thus only when you know the ugliness of beauty and the beauty of ugliness will you [truly] be able to understand beauty and ugliness. Master Zhuang said: “Those who gamble with clay tiles soar with ease, those who gamble with belt-hooks tremble in fear, and those who gamble with gold imperil themselves. Insofar as luck goes, they all [start out] the same, but those who imperil themselves must have something they value externally. Those who value things externally are most likely depleted within.” The man (i.e. father) of Lu can be said to have had something he valued externally.<sup>3</sup>

In the *Zhuangzi*, the story—presumably more or less in the version which the author of “Qu you” cites—is to be found in the “Outer” chapter (*wai pian* 外篇) “Da sheng” 達生, in the following context:

<sup>2</sup>The second of these references, which explores the “use of the useless” via the anecdote concerning the longevity of a useless tree, comes from the “Bi ji” 必己 chapter of the “Xiaoxing lan” 孝行覽; the present paper will not have the space to address this latter reference. Given what we know about the nature of how texts were transmitted in pre-imperial China, it is difficult to imagine that “Zhuangzi” could be referring to a “book” per se, though perhaps it could be taken as a shorthand for the “writings of *Zhuangzi*.” In any case, since the author of the “Qu you” chapter does not even mention Confucius, who in the *Zhuangzi* “Da sheng” version of the anecdote below is the direct vehicle for the statement in question, that author at least clearly recognizes from his source that the thought expressed here is that of Zhuang Zi and his philosophy, and that Confucius is serving here as nothing but a foil.

<sup>3</sup>All translations throughout this paper are my own. Cf. the translation of John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel (Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 288).



顏淵問仲尼曰：「吾嘗濟乎觴深之淵，津人操舟若神。吾問焉，曰：『操舟可學邪？』」曰：『可。善游者數能。若乃夫沒人，則未嘗見舟而便操之也。』吾問焉而不吾告，敢問何謂也？」仲尼曰：「善游者數能，忘水也。若乃夫沒人之未嘗見舟而便操之也，彼視淵若陵，視舟之覆，猶其車卻也。覆卻萬方陳乎前而不得入其舍，惡往而不暇！以瓦注者巧，以鉤注者憚，以黃金注者殫。其巧一也，而有所矜，則重外也。凡外重者內拙。」 (Wang 1987: 158–59)

Yan Yuan (Yan Hui) asked Zhongni (Confucius): “I once crossed over the Deep Chalice Lake, and the ferry boatman handled his boat with spirit-like skill. I asked him: ‘Can [such] handling of a boat be learned?’ and he said: ‘Yes. Those skilled at swimming become capable [of handling a boat] [after] several [rounds of practice].<sup>4</sup> As for underwater divers, they [can] handle the boat immediately without ever before having seen a boat.’ I asked him [for clarification], but he gave me none. Dare I ask to what he was referring?”

Zhongni said: “That those skilled at swimming become capable [after] several [tries] is because they have forgotten the water. As for the underwater diver [being able to] handle a boat immediately without having ever before seen one, it is because he looks upon the lake as one would a hill, and he looks upon the capsizing of a boat as he would the reversal of a carriage. Though any number of capsizings or reversals present themselves before him, they are never able to enter into his [spiritual] ‘lodge’—where could he go and not be at ease?!”

“Those who gamble with clay tiles do so with skill; those who gamble with [bronze or silver] belt hooks do so with trepidation; and those who gamble with gold do so in bewilderment (i.e., bereft of all skill). Their [inherent] skills are identical, and yet some of them are more self-indulged—this is because they place value on something external. Those who value the external are internally clumsy.”

It is not altogether clear whether the remarks on gambling were conceived as the conclusion of Confucius’s reply or rather intended as a commentarial appendage by the text’s author, but given that most of the anecdotes of “Da sheng” seem to take the form of self-contained dialogues, the former appears more likely. The “Huang di” 黃帝 chapter of the *Liezi* 列子, which appears to have taken this, along with a couple of other anecdotes, directly from “Da sheng,” ends the story at exactly the same place, and would thus also appear to be treating the remarks as Confucius’s own elaboration.<sup>5</sup>

As a whole, the “Da sheng” chapter—and we shall treat it provisionally as an integral whole devoid of accretion—revolves around the notion that there are aspects of our destinies that lie wholly beyond our control, no matter how much effort we lavish upon amassing the material things by which we sustain ourselves. Life itself is ultimately subject to irrepressible forces: “We cannot prevent its coming, and cannot hold back its leaving—how tragic!” 生之來不能卻，其去不能止，悲夫！ (Wang 1987: 156). Such a stance on fate is in fact largely congruent with Confucian thought, but the Confucians focus more on fate in terms of success and renown in one’s political career, and draw from their partial resignation to fate the lesson that one should focus on the self-cultivation that is within one’s own control, and thereby

<sup>4</sup>Alternatively, reading 數 in the sense of “craft” or “method”: “become capable [of handling a boat] by [virtue of] their skill-set.”

<sup>5</sup>For the text *Liezi* in question, see Yang Bojun 1979: 59–62.

be ready should the right time come along and an appreciative lord find his way to recognizing one's talents—regardless of whether this ever happens in the end.<sup>6</sup> The *Zhuangzi* focuses here instead more on the quality of life itself in the face of such inexorable realities, and thus advocates abandoning the common social world (*qi shi* 棄世) altogether so as to avoid being tied down by material goods, to form an inseparable bond with Heaven and Earth by achieving the ability to “alter [one's] life” (*geng sheng* 更生) and paradoxically preserve one's form and essence by being able to shift along with their movements: “When one's form and essence suffer no loss, this is what is meant by ‘being able to shift.’ With one's essence further refined to its essence, one returns to serve as minister to Heaven” 形精不虧, 是謂能移; 精而又精, 反以相天 (Wang 1987: 156).

Such at least is the message of the opening paragraph, which is then followed by a series of stories elaborating upon the notion of what such a state of human malleability and essentializing might entail. The first of these, in the form of a question-and-answer between Master Lie Zi 子列子 and Guan Yin 關尹, ascribes to such a “perfected man” such supernatural skills as the ability to “travel underwater without suffocating and walk on fire without feeling the heat” 至人潛行不窒, 蹈火不熱, in a manner that shows no signs of being simply metaphorical. Such amazing skills are a result of the perfected men maintaining their “pure vital energy” (*chun qi* 純氣), wherein they are not enticed by external things and achieve a kind of primordial unity with Heaven and Earth, spiritually “roaming to the place wherein all things find their beginnings and ends” 遊乎萬物之所終始 (Wang 1987: 157). They achieve a “completeness” (*quan* 全) that it is akin to—but far surpasses—one the imbibor of spirits finds in an alcoholic stupor, able to quite literally “fall off the wagon” 墜車 without sustaining any life-threatening injuries, by virtue of the blissfully ignorant state in which he has no knowledge of having even gotten on it in the first place. Mystical unity with primordial creation would seem to quite literally lead to miraculous skills; at the very least, the lack of external values paradoxically leads to the best way to preserve that which one values most: one's life, health, and longevity.

The story of the boatman and its gambling analogy speak to the same idea: great skill is achieved through great forgetting of what is at stake. Valuing the external things that lie beyond one's control, including even one's own life, leads quite naturally to fear and worry over what there is to lose, which leads to a loss of the ability to spontaneously focus and thus ultimately to the loss of the things one values themselves. Gambling and rowing are metaphors for life itself, which is to be lived spontaneously and fully if it is to be lived well at all.

How, then, does this story fit in to the “Qu you” 去尤 chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu*? This chapter is a particularly short one, though it happens to come right after two of the more lengthy chapters of the work—of which we shall have more to say later. “Qu you” is in fact centrally concerned with at least one of the core ideas of

<sup>6</sup>See especially the text “Qionгда yi shi” 窮達以時 from the Guodian corpus 郭店楚簡 and the many other early texts with which it shares much in common. For details, see my *Bamboo Texts of Guodian* (Cook 2012: v. 1, 429–49), with further references.

the “Da sheng,” that of how “obstructions”—i.e., distractions or, more accurately, preoccupations—lead to loss of focus on the matter at hand: “The listeners of today are obstructed by many things, and when you are obstructed by many things, your listening will invariably be contrary” 世之聽者，多有所尤，多有所尤則聽必悖矣。 And as for “the central reason why people have so many obstructions,” it “invariably depends on what the people take pleasure in or what they abhor” 所以尤者多故，其要必因人所喜，與因人所惡 (Xu 2009: 289). The opening remarks are followed by a story of how, after losing an axe, a man suspects his neighbor’s son of having stolen it, and as a result perceives a look of guilt in every aspect of the young man’s bearing, speech, gait, and demeanor. But after the man turns up his axe upon rummaging through his own storage pit, he sees nothing but innocence in the young man the next time he has a chance to observe him—having now ridden himself of his own blinding “obstructions” of suspicion. This is followed by another story illustrating the inability to analyze a situation objectively, in which the ruler of Zhu 邾 is advised by one of his ministers to substitute a stronger and more flexible type of silk thread for a more commonly used variety in the stitching of armor for their soldiers. The ruler at first follows this sensible advice, but later rescinds his order and in fact bans the use of that thread once it is drawn to his attention that the minister’s family is now making a profit from it—that minister quite reasonably directing his family into the business of producing the silk once there was a demand for it. While we may be sympathetic to the ruler’s disdain for this sort of “insider trading,” as it were, the point of the story is that the value of the improved thread does not diminish one bit by the fact that the minister is now profiting off of it, and the ruler is only hurting himself by refusing to allow it to be produced for his army—blinded by his suspicions of ulterior motives.

The interesting thing here is that, with this latter anecdote—which directly precedes the one about the father of Lu quoted earlier—the principle of blinding preoccupations is now placed into an explicitly political context. The ruler is cautioned to assess his minister’s counsel objectively, and to never be charmed by glib persuasions devoid of substance or dissuaded from the proper course due to aspersions cast upon the minister. The ruler is both the man who baselessly suspects his neighbor’s son and thereby misreads the latter’s every intention, and the father who has such adoration for his own son that he is utterly blinded by the latter’s manifest shortcomings. The explicitly political tale of wise counsel gone unheeded is sandwiched in between two stories alternately suggesting the perils of suspicion and the foolishness of partiality. The overall message is clear: listen to counsel with an objective ear, and neither distance your wise ministers due to baseless slander nor heed the words of your favorites out of personal motives having nothing to do with the message itself. What the chapter does *not* address, however, are precisely those concerns most central to the “Da sheng” chapter of the *Zhuangzi*—there is no talk whatsoever of fate, or of how to live one’s life in the face of it.

The “Father of Lu” passage is the concluding anecdote of the chapter, and as the *Zhuangzi* quotation is cited as authority at the conclusion of that anecdote, it almost serves as the final word to the chapter as a whole. And indeed, it serves that purpose well, insofar as the focus of the cited anecdote is narrow enough to accommodate

both the broader life-lessons of “Da sheng” and the more practical political ends of “Qu you.” But just as with the “pipings of Heaven” passage alluded to in “Bu er,” Zhuang Zi’s words of authority are brought to bear upon ends that differ substantially from their original purpose and made to serve almost as a kind of commentary to the text of the passage. Conversely, the context of each of those *Lüshi chunqiu* chapters itself functions as a sort of commentary to the *Zhuangzi* passage in question.

Following the final anecdote, “Qu you” contains some additional concluding remarks as follows:

解在乎齊人之欲得金也，及秦墨者之相妒也，皆有所乎尤也。老聃則得之矣。若植木而立乎獨，必不合於俗。則何可擴矣。(Xu 2009: 289)

The explanation is to be found in “The man of Qi’s desire to obtain gold” and “The mutual jealousy of the Mohists of Qin”—they all had that by which they were obstructed. Lao Dan (Lao Zi), however, got the point. Like an upright tree standing solitary, he would never align himself with the common crowd—what need had he for expansion?<sup>7</sup>

The need to stick in Lao Zi at the end as the final authority is interesting in and of itself, but no less interesting are the references to passages found elsewhere in the *Lüshi chunqiu*—a feature seen only in the “Youshi lan” section of the work.<sup>8</sup>

When we look at the “explanation” references to which the “Qu you” chapter alludes, little doubt remains as to what the real focus of the chapter is. These references are both to be found in a chapter with a remarkably similar—indeed, almost identical—name: “Qu you” 去宥, which is found in the “Xianshi lan” 先識覽 section of the work, and which, to avoid confusion, I will refer to as “Qu you (2).”<sup>9</sup> This chapter begins with the story referenced in the first “Qu you” chapter as the “mutual jealousy of the Mohists in Qin” 秦墨者之相妒, and it turns out to be structurally identical to the story of the ruler of Zhu’s disdain for the “insider profiting” on silk thread from that chapter discussed earlier. In the “Mohists in Qin” story, an eastern Mohist named Xie Zi 謝子 pays a visit westward to King Hui of Qin 秦惠王, but the king’s resident Mohist, Tang Guguo 唐姑果, is so jealous of the prospect that the king will find Xie Zi more worthy than he that he slanders Xie Zi as nothing but a glib persuader intent on securing a position as a favored advisor. Fooled by this slander, King Hui hears Xie Zi out with a mindset already prejudiced by anger and thus ends up heeding none of his words, upon which Xie Zi leaves the state in displeasure. As the story concludes: “Generally speaking, one listens to a speech in order to seek out excellence, and if the words spoken are indeed excellent, what harm is there in one’s striving to secure a position as favored advisor? And if the words spoken are not excellent, what benefit would there be in one’s *not* striving for

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the translation of Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 288.

<sup>8</sup> For more on this feature and the implications of its being limited to these chapters, see Lau 1991: esp. 51–53, and my Gu 2004: esp. 105–6.

<sup>9</sup> With Xu Weiyu, I read the 尤 in the first “Qu you” chapter as a loan for 囿, or enclosing “obstructions,” as the chapter’s message would appear to dictate. The 宥 of the second “Qu you” chapter is almost certainly to be read in the same manner.

such a position?”<sup>10</sup> As before, the ruler is blinded by suspicions of ulterior motives, which, the text again argues, are entirely irrelevant to the wisdom of the persuasion itself. “If one employs one’s intent in such a manner (as King Hui), though one may tire himself out granting audiences with guests and wear out his ears and eyes [listening and observing], he still will not get [the point of] what is addressed.”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the former merchant Lü Buwei was himself worried about slander, the suspicions it would engender, and, ultimately, the loss of his preeminent position, but he certainly did not want to give up any of the manifest benefits he surely received as a result of his position of prime minister of Qin. But even if we take Lü Buwei out of the equation, we can easily see how this argument would have been an attractive one to put forward by any member of the ministerial class who was an articulate persuader and thought he had the force of reason on his side.

The next two stories of “Qu you (2),” though not explicitly referenced in the first “Qu you” chapter, deal with the same theme. The first has King Wei of Jing (Chu 楚) 荆威王 dismiss a scholar who had been instructing him in the study of historical documents (*shu* 書) simply because some petty minister suggested that the word on the street was that the king was now this scholar’s “disciple”—the embarrassed king thereby foolishly forsaking his own chance to learn the wisdom of the former sage-kings. The second has a man cutting down his own tree because the old man next door was complaining about its vileness, but then angered to no end when the old man subsequently asked if he could get some firewood from the felled tree—an anger, the text suggests, fueled only by suspicions and without any real justification, given that the neighbor’s using it for firewood in no way altered the inherent vileness of the tree. The chapter then concludes its anecdotes with the other referenced story, “The man of Qi’s desire to obtain gold” 齊人之欲得金, in which a man brazenly robs another man of his gold as the latter leaves a gold shop, in broad daylight and in front of many bystanders. Apprehended and then questioned on his foolish boldness, the man simply says that “I really didn’t even see the bystanders—all I could see was the gold” 殊不見人，徒見金耳。As the text concludes, “Were not all the rulers of lost states severely blinded by [such mental] obstructions? Thus as a general rule, people must recognize their obstructions before they will have understanding. When they recognize their obstructions, they will be able to ‘make their natures whole.’”<sup>12</sup> This final phrase, “make their natures whole”—more literally, “make whole their Heaven[-born capacities]” (*quan qi tian* 全其天)—may itself be a nod to the writings of the *Zhuangzi*, wherein the similar phrase *zhong qi tiannian* 終其天年, “finish out one’s natural lifespan,” is used several times to describe the “use of the useless” 無用之用. In the *Lüshi chunqiu*, however, the phrase *quan qi tian* is elsewhere found in the context of sagely rule. In the “Ben sheng” 本生 chapter, for instance, we are told that “the sage’s fashioning of the myriad things is

<sup>10</sup> 凡聽言，以求善也。所言苟善，奮於取少主，何損？所言不善，雖不奮於取少主，何益？Xu 2009: 424.

<sup>11</sup> 用志若是，見客雖勞，耳目雖弊，猶不得所謂也。Xu 2009: 424.

<sup>12</sup> 亡國之主，其皆甚有所害邪？故凡人必別有然後知，別有則能全其天矣。Xu 2009: 426.

[achieved] by making his [own] nature whole” 聖人之制萬物也，以全其天也 (Xu 2009: 15); and in the “Da Yue” 大樂 chapter, the line “those who can order themselves through unity can avoid disasters, live out their life-spans, and make their natures whole” 能以一治其身者，免於災，終其壽，全其天 is followed by similar statements about “those who can order their states 國 through unity” and “those who can order the world 天下 through unity” (Xu 2009: 111)—making clear that the individualistic philosophical wisdom of Zhuang Zi and his followers is ultimately always to be brought to bear upon the political efficacy of the ruler himself.

We can learn more about the intended message of “Qu you” (1) if we examine it within the context of the chapters that both precede and follow it within the “Youshi lan” 有始覽 section. This is the opening section of the “Eight lan” 八覽 (“Eight Surveys”) part of the work, and as such was likely imbued with special significance.<sup>13</sup> The namesake chapter of the section, “You shi” 有始, opens that section with nothing less than a broadly complete numerological account of the celestial and geographic orders of Heaven and Earth themselves. “The harmonious interaction of Heaven and Earth is the great ordering network of life” 天地合和，生之大經: it produces a balanced (*ping* 平) cycle of life that we must understand and examine, and in which we must occupy our proper place. Following its opening statements, the chapter goes on to exhaustively enumerate the nine celestial fields (*jiu ye* 九野) of Heaven, the nine territories (*jiu zhou* 九州) of Earth,<sup>14</sup> the nine mountains ranges (*jiu shan* 九山) of the land, the nine passes (*jiu sai* 九塞) of the mountains, the nine marshes (*jiu sou* 九藪) of the wetlands, the eight cardinal categories (*ba feng* 八風) of wind, and the six major rivers (*liu chuan* 六川) of the waterways. The text then gives an account of the overall longitudinal and latitudinal distances of all the land “within the four seas” 四海之內 and total numbers of and distances covered by all the various rivers and streams; this is followed by the longitudinal and latitudinal distances of all the celestial space “within the four extremities” 四極之內 and a brief description of the unmoving central position of the pole star (*ji xing* 極星), as well as the path travelled by the sun at the winter and summer solstices and an account of where the central position of Heaven and Earth was thought to lie. The kicker, however, comes in the concluding lines of the chapter:

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, given that *Lü Lan* 呂覽 is often found in early citations as an alternate title for the work, along with other factors, many scholars have long suspected that the “Eight lan” might have originally opened the work as a whole, rather than the “Shi’er ji,” as the received editions all have it. On this point, see the comments of Zhou Zhongfu 周中孚 and others as cited in Tian 1986: 67–68. See also Yang Shuda 1935: 245–56, and Lau 1991: 49–50.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the nine territories are each equated with states that would seem to reflect a historical view of things as they were in the Chunqiu and earlier: i.e., Jin 晉 is named as a collective entity, and Wei 衛, Lu 魯, and Yue 越 are territorially placed on equal footing with both it and the other four major powers of Qi 齊, Yan 燕, Chu 楚, and, of course, Qin 秦; the Zhou 周 is listed first of all. Note, however, the absence from this scheme of the Shang-descendent state of Song 宋, as well as that of Wu 吳—though Song, Wu, Liang (i.e., Wei 魏), and Zhao 趙 are all later mentioned in the chapter as states in which some of the nine wetlands are to be found.



天地萬物，一人之身也，此之謂大同。眾耳目鼻口也，眾五穀寒暑也，此之謂眾異則萬物備也。天斟萬物，聖人覽焉，以觀其類。解在乎天地之所以形，雷電之所以生，陰陽材物之精，人民禽獸之所安平。(Xu 2009: 283–84)

Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things are as the body of a single person—this is what is known as “great uniformity.” The many [apertures of] the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth are as the many [differences among] the five grains and the [alternations of] cold and hot [weather]—this is what is known as “with the differences of the many, the myriad things are in complete supply.” Heaven sets forth the myriad things in appropriate measure, and the sage surveys them so as to observe their categories.

The explanation is to be found in “That by which Heaven and Earth take form, that by which thunder and lightning arise, the essence of *yin* and *yang*’s fashioning of the myriad things, and that wherein the people and animals find peace and security.”<sup>15</sup>

The “explanation” reference—the first one to occur in the *Lüshi chungiu*—here points to a passage that either cannot be identified or somehow never made it into the final version of the work; or perhaps in this particular instance it was not meant as a concrete reference at all. Leaving this issue aside, let us observe the penultimate paragraph, which is most telling. In essence, the passage speaks to precisely the same integrated, organismic notion of achieving uniformity through harmony that we earlier saw at work in the “Bu er” chapter of the work (the seventh chapter of the “Shenfen lan” 審分覽): “To even out the myriad differences, so that the foolish and wise, artful and clumsy, are able to exhaust their individual capabilities, as if they all emerged from a single hollow—who but the sage is capable of this?” Here, the sage is again called upon to achieve “great uniformity” (*da tong* 大同) by “surveying” (*lan* 覽) the diversity of the natural world and the way in which it is arranged into an integrated and ordered whole—and by implication, this is precisely what the work itself, and the political order it aims to model, is designed to achieve, with its literary “surveys” of political wisdom, in which the diverse categories of philosophical perspective are made, despite their divergent origins, to function as a single organismic body, or as a musical symphony of unified diversity.

Whereas “You shi” paints the grand philosophical picture, the political implications are made more explicit in the second chapter of the section, “Ying tong” 應同 (“Responding to the Identical”).<sup>16</sup> The chapter presents a somewhat convoluted argument, beginning with the statement that “Whenever an emperor or king is about to arise, Heaven will invariably first display a portent to the people below” 凡帝王者之將興也，天必先見祥乎下民。The first example given is that of the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, upon whose rise Heaven made giant earthworms and mole crickets appear, prompting the Yellow Emperor to declare that “the energy of soil is ascendant” (*tu qi sheng* 土氣勝) and to take soil and its color of yellow as the emblems of his rule. The examples then proceed in five-phase order of conquest—Yu 禹 with portents related to verdant wood, Shang King Tang 湯 with those of white metal, and Zhou King Wen 文 with those of red fire—to be culminated, as dictated by the

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the somewhat different translation of Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 282.

<sup>16</sup> This chapter is also known by the alternate title of “Ming lei” 名類, thought to be an error for “Zhao lei” 召類, which would, however, duplicate the title of a later chapter in the work



cycle, by portents related to water, the color of which is black. But “if the arrival of the energy of water is not recognized, the sequence will move [back] on to soil upon its completion” 水氣至而不知，數備，將徙于土 (Xu 2009: 284). Given Lü Buwei’s position, this could only mean that it was time for Qin—long since the dominant power in the land—to consummate its conquest of the world and establish itself once and for all as its new dynastic leader.<sup>17</sup> The chapter then goes on to discuss the general principle of sympathetic resonance, as when the striking of a certain musical tone on one instrument will distantly sound the same tone in another, or water flowing onto level ground will seek out the places that are already wet, in all cases revealing to us traces of their common identity. The lesson to be learned from this is that we can easily thwart ourselves if we act in ways that upset this principle: just as phoenixes will not arrive when we overturn nests and crush eggs, sons will not follow their fathers and ministers will not follow their rulers if the latter “treat white as black” or “black as white.” Thus while a hegemon aims to unify in strength 同力, and a king seeks to unify in propriety 同義, a true emperor has the goal of unifying in energy 同氣, and all the world’s great rulers of the past achieved their rule by “refining” (*jing* 精) their intentions in such a way as to lead all the people to goodness. For like follows like, and the people will invariably follow the lead of their ruler, who is ultimately responsible for the fortune or misfortune that he beckons through his example, and order ultimately leads to security, as no profit or fame can ever come from attacking a state that is well ordered and thus welcomes no trouble from its neighbors. Once again, the overall message of the chapter is one of unification, in this case the political unification of the world—and while this does not imply any lack of intellectual diversity, it does entail the creation of a common positive energy by an enlightened leader who recognizes that his time has come to once again integrate the world toward a unified purpose.

This, then, is the backdrop against which our “Qu you” chapter unfolds. The connection between this chapter and the foregoing is, of course, not immediately clear, but given the *Lüshi chunqiu*’s penchant for grouping chapters together within sections on the basis of thematic continuity, the presumed intention to establish at least an implicit connection invites us to explore its implications within that context. “Qu you” tells us that the ruler of a state, just like anyone else with the capacity to be blinded by preconceptions, must rid himself of such biases in order to welcome and accept wise counsel from whatever source it may happen to present itself. The preceding chapters suggest that this principle applies no less to the Son of Heaven—a position destined to fall to the King of Qin—who must, like Heaven itself, fully embrace the diversity of the world at the same time that he is to harness it behind a common energy for which he sets the tone. “Qu you” tells us that the model ruler who treats white as white and black as black is one who in fact accepts wise counsel

<sup>17</sup>Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907), however, actually interprets this to mean that the time of water has already passed unrecognized, and that the next king of the world should take soil as his emblem—advice that the First Emperor, according to Yu, foolishly ignored after Lü’s death by in fact adopting the symbol of black water (see Xu 2009: 284).

from all sources and judges it not on the basis of who presented it, but on the wisdom of the counsel itself.

The subsequent chapters of the “Youshi lan” continue to elaborate upon this theme. “Ting yan” 聽言 (“Listening to Words”) states the problem outright at the beginning: “One must not fail to examine the words to which one listens. Should one fail to examine them, good and ill will not be distinguished, and there is no greater disorder than the failure to distinguish good from ill” 聽言不可不察。不察則善不善不分。善不善不分，亂莫大焉 (Xu 2009: 291). The chapter attributes nothing less than the decline of the three dynasties and the disorder of the present age to this failure, resulting in a situation wherein rulers impoverish the people while indulging themselves in the most extravagant of pleasures, from great displays of bells and drums (perhaps a tip to the Mohists) to elaborate terraces and gardens, and sacrificing people’s lives through their incessant lust for warfare—all ultimately to the peril of their own altars of state. The opening of the chapter ends with an implicit call for a new king: “Thus in the present age, it would not be difficult for one who is able to distinguish good from ill to become king” 故當今之世，有能分善不善者，其王不難 (Xu 2009: 292). The chapter goes on, also in rather Mohist fashion, to extol the virtues of “love and benefit” 愛利 as the great ways upon which all good things are based, and observes that the world has so long been bereft of an enlightened king who adheres to these virtues and shows concern for the people that it thirsts for one night and day. The chapter then lays the following claim:

功先名，事先功，言先事。不知事惡能聽言？不知情惡能當言？其與人穀（穀）言也，其有辯乎？其無辯乎？ (Xu 2009: 293)<sup>18</sup>

Accomplishments precede reputation, affairs precede accomplishments, and words precede affairs. If you do not understand affairs, how will you be able to listen to words? If you do not understand true situations (*qing*), how will you be able to make words properly correspond? [In such as case,] one would [only] be exchanging “fledgling words” with others—is there any distinction? Or is there no distinction?

This is surely a conscious echo of lines from the “Qiwulun” 齊物論 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*:

夫言非吹也，言者有言。其所言者特未定也。果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？其以為異於穀音，亦有辯乎？其無辯乎？ (Wang 1987: 13)

For words are not [just] blowing: their speaker has words to say, but it is just that the words they speak are not yet stable. Does one really have words to speak? Or has one never spoken anything? One takes them to be different from the twittering of fledgling birds—but is there really a distinction? Or is there no distinction?

Here, there *is* in fact a distinction, one not to be overlooked. For the *Zhuangzi*, the instability of words is a philosophical problem, hopelessly intertwined with the relativism of perspectives, in which what is affirmed by one philosophical position can invariably be disaffirmed by another, without any ultimate position by which to objectively choose between them. For the *Liushi chunqiu*, listening to words is a political issue, and there is plenty of good advice to be had so long as one is not

<sup>18</sup> I follow Chen Changqi 陳昌齊 and Tao Hongqing 陶鴻慶 in seeing 穀 as an error (or phonetic loan) for 穀. Cf. the translation of Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 290–91.

beguiled by mere words but looks to the substance behind them and measures them against true conditions and the principle of concern for the welfare of the people. Or as the chapter puts it in conclusion:

凡人亦必有所習其心，然後能聽說。不習其心，習之於學問。不學而能聽說者，古今無有也。(Xu 2009: 293)

In general, people must have something at which they have become well practiced in their minds before they will be able to properly listen to persuasions. If one is not practiced in his mind, he acquires such practice through learning and inquiry. From ancient times to the present, there has never been one who could properly listen to persuasions without [first acquiring] learning.<sup>19</sup>

In short, the chapter suggests that all the ills of the world are caused by glib persuaders who, it would seem, are able to ingratiate themselves with rulers by essentially providing them with logical excuses for engaging in the kind of self-indulgent behavior toward which they are already inclined, thus making them deaf to the true principles of benefitting the people, which an enlightened ruler would intuitively understand and take as his guiding principle against which to measure such specious arguments. The “Ting yan” chapter is relatively unique in presenting no anecdotes, but it does point to such anecdotes in other chapters by way of the “the explanation lies in” device—in this case, the explanations all involve the words of famous sophists, including arguments implicating Zhuang Zi’s well-known philosophical sparring partner, Hui Shi 惠施, who is soundly berated as both an incompetent bureaucrat and specious persuader throughout the *Lüshi chunqiu*, one who almost singlehandedly brought about the decline of Wei 魏 by allowing King Hui 魏惠王 to impoverish the state through his needless indulgence in ill-conceived warfare.<sup>20</sup>

The fifth chapter of “Youshi lan,” “Jin ting” 謹聽 (“Listening Cautiously”), tackles the same issue from a somewhat different perspective. It starts out by noting how the ancient Kings—Yu 禹 in particular—were especially anxious to understand their own insufficiencies (*tong hu ji zhi buzu* 通乎己之不足) by seeking out and “treating with ceremonial courtesy” worthy “men of the way” (*li you dao zhi shi* 禮有道之士), listening to them calmly while allowing them to speak their minds. The rulers of lost states did the opposite, acting with arrogance toward worthies and thus effectively barring the doors of wise counsel, an attitude that inherently beckons disorder and caused nothing less than the downfalls of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. Thus the ruler who does not doubt the limits of his own knowledge will be in peril; even where he has the knowledge and rightly harbors no doubts, he must still examine and verify his convictions through all objective measures, lest he err in choosing the proper courses of action. The way that Yao 堯 obtained Shun 舜, and Shun obtained Yu—and indeed, how all worthies are ultimately recognized by their sovereigns—was by “judging them through their [own] ears” 斷之於耳, which is achieved primarily through the introspective act of “reflecting on the true condition of human nature and its mandate” 反性命之情, and secondarily by observing the

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the translation of Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 291.

<sup>20</sup> See especially the “Bu qu” 不屈 chapter, which is solely devoted to disparaging Hui Shi (Xu 2009: 494–99).

historical reasons for the successes of the ancient sage-kings of the past (lessons imparted, to be sure, throughout the *Lüshi chunqiu* itself). And the paramount reason for the prosperity of the ancient sage-kings lay in their recognizing the limits of their own knowledge and respectfully inquiring of and learning from worthies of the way. As the text summarizes:

主賢世治則賢者在，主不肖世亂則賢者在。今周室既滅，天子已絕。亂莫大於無天子，無天子則彊者勝弱，眾者暴寡，以兵相殘，不得休息，今之世當之矣。故當今之世，求有道之士，則於四海之內、山谷之中、僻遠幽閒之所，若此則幸於得之矣。得之則何欲而不得？何為而不成？(Xu 2009: 296–97)

When the ruler is worthy and the age well ordered, worthies are in high positions; when the ruler is unworthy and the age disordered, worthies are in low position. Now the house of Zhou has already been exterminated and the Son of Heaven's transmission has been cut off. There is no disorder greater than having no Son of Heaven: the strong defeat the weak and the many abuse the few, harming each other through warfare, with no one able to rest—this is the state of the present age. Thus in the present age, we must seek out men of the way from the four corners of the world, in mountains and valleys, in far-off and secluded places—if we do this, we might be fortunate enough to obtain them. Should we obtain them, what desire could we not attain? What undertaking could we not accomplish?<sup>21</sup>

The call to seek out worthies, treat them with respect, and listen to their wise counsel can hardly be understood outside the context of Lü Buwei's patronage of scholars and his own position as prime minister to the future First Emperor, and the implications for this current king of Qin could not be any clearer.

The sixth chapter of the section, “Wu ben” 務本 (“Strive for the Fundamental”), turns the focus to the ministers themselves: all ministers desire to attain an accomplished reputation, but few do, precisely because they focus on themselves, unlike the ministers of the founding kings of the three dynasties, who were all able to “arrive at their private [good] through [focus on] the common [good]” 以公及其私, worrying about their rulers and the states rather than themselves and their own households.<sup>22</sup> The basis of security and glory lies in the ruler, whose basis lies in the ancestral temple, the basis of which in turn lies in the people, and “the order or chaos of the people depends upon the officials” 民之治亂在於有司. The noble official does not seek his riches dishonestly through corrupt or obsequious practices, and in the end “glory and riches do not arrive on their own—they come on the heels of accomplishments” 榮富非自至也，緣功伐也 (Xu 2009: 300). Thus the loyal minister worries first and foremost over what is within his control—his own conduct—and he will accept neither positions of which he is incapable nor salaries of which he is underserving. In short, this chapter provides the concomitant prerequisite to the impartial and respectful hearing of worthies stressed in “Qu you” and other chapters: that such worthies exist in the first place—that those with sage advice to offer are actually offering it and are not tempted, like those who seek to obstruct their counsel, to take untenable shortcuts to ministerial glory.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the translation of Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 294.

<sup>22</sup> Portions of this chapter's opening are also to be found in the “Wu da” 務大 (“Strive for Greatness”) chapter later in the work (Xu 2009: 680).

The seventh and final chapter of “Youshi lan,” “Yu da” 諭大 (“Illustrate Greatness”), begins by essentially stating the view that one should “aim big,” that all great men from Shun on down to Confucius and Mo Zi strove to accomplish things that ultimately proved to be beyond their capabilities or circumstances, and yet they still accomplished great things nonetheless. Vast lands will have tall mountains, and large mountains and rivers will be home to prodigious creatures, whereas small wells and new forests will find nothing but the smallest of fish and saplings, and thus “true it is that all plans to accomplish [great] things must derive from [an eye toward] the vast, the numerous, and the long-lasting” 凡謀物之成也，必由廣大眾多長久，信也。The chapter—and the section as a whole—concludes by placing this notion within the context of how the greater good and individual goods must all work together, the idea that the security of the small and great are mutually dependent. Just as the family of finches happily nesting in a house is oblivious to its impending doom when a stove fire ignites the support beam, members of a ministerial family happily collecting their salaries and politically supporting each other may be equally oblivious to their own downfall as their neglect of the greater good has come to imperil the state as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Thus “when the world is in great chaos, there are no secure states” 天下大亂，無有安國，as “the stability of the small depends on the great, and the security of the great depends on the small” 故小之定也必恃大，大之安也必恃小 (Xu 2009: 305).

This notion provides a logical closing bookend to the opening of “Youshi lan,” which, once again, presented the grand vision of a political universe that operates like the natural world, wherein “Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things are as the body of a single person,” the “great uniformity” in which all members of the vast hierarchy function together as an integral whole, working harmoniously together for the greater good of society at large. The constant references throughout “Youshi lan” to the great kings of past dynasties and, in particular, the explicit calls for a new king to emerge and reimplement such a “great uniformity” make it clear that Lü Buwei and his retainer-authors had nothing less than the rulership of the impending Qin empire in mind, desiring, no doubt, to craft and stabilize their own positions within that new empire. The grand universal vision was ultimately designed in the service of an acutely tangible political dream.

### 3 Conclusion

In the process, the passages borrowed from the writings of the *Zhuangzi* have undergone a great transformation—from expressions of a philosophy celebrating individual freedom and questioning the entire possibility of stability in meaning or of finding any ultimate relevance in doctrinal positions, in which the entrapments of the life of officialdom are generally eschewed in favor of one unmarred by the

<sup>23</sup>A closely parallel version of this story is to be found in the “Wu da” 務大 chapter later in the work (Xu 2009: 680–81).

pretensions of political service, to ones which are instead in the service of precisely the grand political structure envisioned by the *Lüshi chunqiu*, in which the producer of the wind that blows forth to sound the wondrous harmony of the world's myriad hollows is no longer some mysterious unknown, but rather a king or emperor who lays forth the model of virtue by which the world will respond in resonance with a unified energy. The *Lüshi chunqiu* may well not be a commentary on the *Zhuangzi* (or, more accurately, certain individual texts transmitted by the followers of Zhuang Zi)—as it does not attempt to explicitly analyze the text of the *Zhuangzi*, but rather allows the *Zhuangzi* to in effect comment on the *Lüshi chunqiu*'s own arguments—but it nonetheless functions just like a commentary, insofar as it reads the *Zhuangzi* passages along a particular line of interpretation, by virtue of the context in which it places them. By giving the *Zhuangzi* an implicitly political interpretation, the *Lüshi chunqiu* is little different from a long line of commentaries on the *Shi jing* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*) from the early Han onwards, in which poems that originated as simple folk songs are brought into the service of political ends with the greatest of interpretive ingenuity—a practice that ultimately derived not from commentary per se, but from the selective quotation of lines from the Odes in the service of diplomatic statements and, somewhat later, from their citation as authoritative encapsulations of grand notions used to punctuate philosophical statements or arguments in Confucian texts ranging from “Ziyi” 緇衣 (“Black Robes”) to the *Xunzi* 荀子. If Gadamer is correct, the interpretive process is essentially an effort wherein we attempt to gain a grip on something that is already starting to slip from our intellectual grasp and hold it to the light of our own consciousness, an attempt to turn the “unfamiliar” into the “familiar.” But this process, he adds, invariably bears great resemblance to an independent act of creation, and the tools that it uses are those borrowed from the art of rhetoric (Gadamer 1967: 21–25). This is all the more true when we are not simply trying to take hold of past wisdom and preserve it, but to consciously adapt it in order to harness it in the service of political ends. This is precisely what the *Lüshi chunqiu* does with the *Zhuangzi*, in some instances without even barely having changed a single word. In this regard, it stands at the head of a long line of works in the Chinese commentarial tradition, even though it may have achieved its aims more subtly and seamlessly than the explicit commentaries of later times.

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## **Part II**

# **Concepts**

# Chapter 5

## The *Zhuangzi* and the Division Between Heaven and Human



Franklin Perkins

### 1 Introduction: Heaven and Human

Chinese philosophy commonly brings to mind monism, continuity, unity, and mutual resonance. Indeed, cosmological thinkers in early China shared a belief that the ultimate foundation of the world is one and thus that diversity emerges from a more fundamental unity, whether labelled as *dao* 道 (the way), *wu* 無 (a primordial undifferentiated state of no-beings), or *yi* 一 (the one, oneness, or unity). The way that all things fit together is often expressed with the phrase *tianren heyi* (天人合一), heaven and human fitting together as one. The problem is that from a pragmatic or phenomenological view, it is obvious that human values, cultures, and institutions diverge from and sometimes even conflict with the broader patterns of nature. Chinese thought in the early Zhou dynasty largely evaded this problem by anthropomorphizing the natural world, taking heaven (*tian* 天) as a deity that enforced human morality and cared for human well-being. That position was taken up by the Mohists. As this view faded, heaven became more and more associated with the immanent patterns and dynamism of nature. In that context, an imperative to recognize the tension between human beings and the natural world arose, formulated as *tianrenzhifen* 天人之分, the division between heaven and human.<sup>1</sup>

Both of these perspectives appear regularly in the *Zhuangzi*. For example, the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, “Equalizing Assessments of Things” (Qiwulun 齊物論), says: “Heaven and earth were born and live together with me, and the

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<sup>1</sup> On the tension between these two mottoes, see Perkins 2014: 13–17.

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ten-thousand things and I form one” (Guo 1978: 79).<sup>2</sup> Another line says: “Thus whether one raises a twig or a pillar, a leper or the beautiful Xi Shi, whether strange, grotesque, uncanny, or deceptive – *dao* connects [*tong* 通] them all as one” (Guo 1978: 70). At the same time, various sections and chapters of the *Zhuangzi* urge us to recognize not unity but the *division* between heaven and human. One common approach to the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* is through the tension between human perspectives and what P.J. Ivanhoe calls “the Heavenly point of view” (Ivanhoe 1996: 200–201).<sup>3</sup> These two aspects of the *Zhuangzi* are not contradictory – the distinctiveness of human beings becomes an issue precisely because its underlying metaphysics precludes radical differences. This chapter will examine the relationship between heaven and human across the *Zhuangzi*. The first section sets the broader context. The second section shows how the division between heaven and human appears in the *Zhuangzi*, while the third section turns to parts of the *Zhuangzi* that complicate or undermine that division. The final section looks beyond the explicit juxtaposition of heaven and human to consider the broader status of heaven and human in the Inner Chapters.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 The Division Between Heaven and Human

The earliest example we have of an explicit distinction between heaven and human is from an excavated text written on bamboo strips that were buried around 300 BCE. The text, found at Guodian, is known as *Failure and Success are by Timing* (*Qiongdā yishi* 窮達以時). It begins:

There is heaven and there is human; heaven and human have a division. By examining the division between heaven and human, one knows what to do. If there is the right person but not the right age, then even if he is worthy, he cannot enact it. If it is the right age, what difficulty can there be? (Cook 2012: 453, strips 1–2)

The bulk of the text consists of examples showing that virtue (*de* 德) and wisdom (*zhi* 智) do not guarantee success or reward, focusing on people who went from failure to success or success to failure without any change in their character. It thus separates human worthiness and effort from what actually happens to us in the world, attributing the latter to heaven. Heaven is not influenced by moral concerns,

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<sup>2</sup>References to the *Zhuangzi* are based on the Chinese text in Guo 1978. All translations are my own, but I have regularly consulted and sometimes borrowed from Ziporyn 2020 (and Ziporyn 2009). For convenience of reference, I use the translations of the chapter titles in Ziporyn 2020.

<sup>3</sup>For other discussions of the *Zhuangzi* in terms of a contrast between heaven and human, see Graham 1989: 195–199; Van Norden 1996; Perkins 2005; Perkins 2014: 151–183, and Chong 2016: 1–19.

<sup>4</sup>The *Zhuangzi* as a whole clearly contains diverse materials that overlap and diverge in different ways and to different degrees. In this chapter, I trace out some of these commonalities and divergences, without speculating on the various ways in which these materials might be unified around authorial intentions.

with the implication that heaven just describes the processes of the world itself. The term for division, *fen* 分, has a particular association with a division into roles or distinctions between what is allotted to different things. The point, then, is to distinguish two regions of action and control. By knowing the division between heaven and human, we avoid letting the realm of heaven undermine our human ethics, thus maintaining a commitment to action and to our human perspective. The materials found in this excavated text appear in other forms across a range of texts, including the “You zuo” (宥坐) chapter of the *Xunzi* (Wang 1988: 256).<sup>5</sup> Knowing the division between heaven and human plays a fundamental role in the “Discourse on Heaven” (Tianlun 天論) chapter of the *Xunzi*. As in *Failure and Success*, the point of the distinction is in determining where to focus our effort:

Magnifying heaven and longingly thinking of it – how can this compare with raising things and arranging them?  
 Following heaven and singing its praise – how can this compare with arranging what heaven mandates [*tianming* 天命] and using it?  
 Looking off toward timing and waiting for it – how can this compare with responding to the time and making it serve?  
 Following along relying [*yin* 因] on things and considering their multiplicity – how can this compare with intensifying their abilities and transforming them?  
 To longingly think of things and take them for granted as things – how can this compare with integrally ordering [*li* 理] things and not losing them?  
 To yearn for that by which things are generated – how can this compare with having that by which things are completed?  
 Thus to discard the human and think longingly of heaven is to lose the genuine characteristics [*qing* 情] of the ten thousand things. (Wang 1988: 317)

In using the division of heaven and human to label the boundaries of human efficacy, the *Xunzi* echoes *Failure and Success*, but the *Xunzi* uses the point in a fundamentally different way. *Failure and Success* presents heaven as mysterious and unpredictable. The *Xunzi* presents it as an orderly system that is indifferent to human concerns:

The course of heaven has regularity: it is not that it exists for a Yao and does not exist for a Jie. Respond to it with order and it will be propitious. Respond to it with disorder and it will be unpropitious. If you strengthen the root and restrain expenses, then heaven cannot make you poor. If you cultivate basic provisions and move with the seasons, then heaven cannot make you ill. If you cultivate the way and do not err, then heaven cannot give misfortune. Thus floods and droughts cannot cause starvation, cold and heat cannot cause sickness, and omens and aberrations cannot be unpropitious. [...] Thus one who understands the division between heaven and human can be called a person who has reached the utmost [*zhiren* 至人]. (Wang 1988: 306-308)

Because the natural world is regular and predictable, human beings can use it for their own ends. The power of nature can be turned to our advantage, so that if humans take care of their own region of influence, even heaven cannot stop us. Where *Failure and Success* presents human weakness, the *Xunzi* emphasizes our collective strength. In the division between heaven and human, *Xunzi* places

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of parallel's in other texts, see Cook 2012: 431–439.

greatest emphasis on the human. He presents Zhuangzi as reversing this hierarchy, saying, “Zhuangzi was blinded by heaven and did not know the human”. Since Zhuangzi viewed the dao only in terms of heaven, his way consisted entirely in “going along with things” (*yin* 因) (Wang 1988: 391–93). Xunzi frames the philosophy of Zhuangzi through the divergence between the demands of heaven and of the human. Xunzi cultivates the power of the human to reshape the world according to our values and perspectives, while Zhuangzi appeals to heaven to undermine the human, so that he justifies only going along with or adapting to things.

### 3 Heaven and Human in the *Zhuangzi*

We do not know the sources Xunzi used to evaluate Zhuangzi’s philosophy, but there is little reason to assume he relied on what we now take to be the Inner Chapters. Esther Klein has shown decisively that those chapters held no privileged position in relation to Zhuangzi through the Han dynasty (Klein 2010). The evidence that most clearly supports Xunzi’s description of Zhuangzi as privileging heaven over the human appears in chapter 17, “Autumn Waters” (Qishui 秋水). The chapter starts with a long dialogue between the River God and the North Sea, focused on the question of norms. As the autumn waters flow into the river, the River God is pleased, taking himself as exhausting the limits of the world. He flows along until he encounters the North Sea, whose limits so far exceed his own. Seeing his shock, the North Sea explains:

You cannot discuss the sea with a well-frog, because it is restricted in space. You cannot discuss ice with a summer insect, because it is constrained in time. You cannot discuss the way with a cramped scholar, because he is bound by education. (Guo 1978: 562–63)

The River God replies with the key question – what then is the proper context or perspective? His first thought is that everything could be measured in relation to whatever is objectively the largest (heaven and earth) and objectively the smallest (the tip of an autumn hair). The North Sea denies this:

As for things, measuring has no limit, timing has no pause, divisions have no constancy, beginnings and endings have no reason. (Guo 1978: 568)

Given the limits of our knowledge, whatever we choose as the ultimate frame of reference might be exceeded by something even bigger or smaller. The River God tries to avoid this conclusion by positing ultimate limits in size: “the most subtle is the formless; the most extensive is the unencompassable.” The North Sea responds by distinguishing two views. In so far as we can label anything as big or small, coarse or subtle, then we must be within the realm of forms (*xing* 形). In that case, the labels remain relative to our perceptions – what we are unable to divide further gets labeled as formless and what we cannot further count gets labeled as unencompassable. If, instead, we appeal to an ultimate that is truly without form or limit, then

categories like large and small no longer apply at all and they provide no form by which to measure other things. At this point, the River God asks the North Sea how to determine what is more and less valuable. The North Sea offers three perspectives:

Looking at it from *dao*, no thing is more or less valuable; looking at it from things, they see themselves as more valuable and the other as less; looking at it from custom, more or less valuable is not determined by oneself. (Guo 1978: 584)

After listening to a lengthy explanation, the River God points out that his question still has not been answered. He tries again by asking, what should I do and not do? The North Sea describes how the sagely person just goes along with things without making firm judgments. He ends by rejecting the question, saying whether one acts or does not act, everything will be transforming of itself. The dialogue has continually developed toward the rejection of all norms, prompting the River God to finally asks, if there are no standards or norms, why does *dao* matter at all? North Sea answers with the division between heaven and human:

One who knows *dao* certainly penetrates the coherent patterns; one who penetrates the coherent patterns certainly has insight into weighing the moment; one who has insight into weighing the moment does not let things harm the self. Those with the utmost virtuosity – fires cannot burn them, waters cannot drown them, cold and heat cannot harm them, birds and beasts cannot attack them. It is not that these are trivial. It means that they examine safety and danger, are at peace in fortune and misfortune, and are diligent in leaving and arriving, and so nothing can harm them. Thus it is said: heaven is with the internal [*nei* 內], the human is with the external [*wai* 外]. Virtuosity is with heaven. Recognize the actions of heaven and of the human. Root yourself in heaven and position yourself in gain. Whether advancing or retreating, crouching or extending, return to the essentials and speak to the limit. (Guo 1978: 588)

The ultimate goal is to avoid harm and this is done through the ability to adapt to the demands of the particular situation, literally to balance or weigh (*quan* 權) the configuration of the moment. That ability comes from penetrating, reaching, or extending through (*da* 達) the coherent patterns (*li* 理) of the world. The value of the way is in enabling us to do that. The connection to the division between heaven and human is not explicit but what allows us to respond to the configuration of the moment is internal rather than external, lies in virtuosity (*de* 德), and expresses our connection to heaven. In contrast, the human refers to the categories, labels, and norms that interfere with this skillful and spontaneous engagement with the world. Like Xunzi, one must know the division between heaven and human, but the priority is clearly with heaven. The dialogue concludes with the River God asking how to recognize the distinction between heaven and human. The North Sea responds:

An ox and horse having four feet – that is called heaven. Putting a bridle on the head of the horse or piercing the nose of the ox – that is called human. Thus it is said: do not use the human to destroy the heavenly, do not use deliberate reasons [*gu* 故] to destroy what is allotted, do not use gain to harm reputation. Diligently protect this and do not lose it. This is called returning to the genuine. (Guo 1978: 590-91)

This division is close to a distinction we would make between the natural (heaven) and the artificial (human), and the North Sea takes it as unproblematic.<sup>6</sup> The concern, though, is not with human technology or institutions but rather the human categories, desires, and purposes that would lead us to resist the spontaneous happening of things. The North Sea does not say we must eliminate the human, but we must keep it from harming the heavenly. That returns us to what is genuine or authentic, *zhen* 真. A similar normative distinction between the natural and the artificial underlies the so-called “Primitivist” chapters, chapters 8, 9 and 10.<sup>7</sup> As in “Autumn Waters,” the “Horse Hooves” (Mati 馬蹄) chapter draws the distinction through our treatment of domestic animals. Horses naturally have what they need to survive – hooves to run on ice and snow, fur to keep warm, grass to eat and water to drink. Living spontaneously in this way expresses their genuine dispositions (*zhenxing* 真性). When human beings manage the horses, they modify their manes, fur, and hooves, and confine them and feed them, leading to their misery and death. Those who claim to manage human beings do the same, disrupting natural harmony and contentment, creating suffering and want. The author rejects that kind of management:

I think that being good at managing the world is not like this. The people have regular dispositions: they weave and have clothing, plough and have food. This is called unified virtuosity [*tongde* 同德]. They are one without factions. This is named heaven’s indulgence (*tianfang* 天放). (Guo 1978: 334)

Although this is the only mention of heaven in these three chapters, the key terms they use – virtuosity (*de*), natural dispositions (*xing*), what is fated or allotted (*ming* 命), and the genuine (*zhen*) – all echo “Autumn Floods” and are consistently associated with heaven. This division sets up naturalness as a criterion by which to determine correct actions. Those that follow genuine dispositions are good and those that violate them are bad. Thus “Webbed Toes” (Pianmu 駢拇) advocates a standard of goodness with no trace of irony or skepticism:

That which I call good (*zang* 臧) is not so-called benevolence and rightness but just being good in one’s own virtuosity. What I call good is not so-called benevolence and rightness but just relying on (*ren* 任) the true condition of one’s natural dispositions and endowment (*xingmingzhiqing* 性命之情). (Guo 1978: 327)

The Primitivist chapters advocate using naturalness as a norm for evaluating actions – ploughing and weaving are good but not more advanced technologies;

<sup>6</sup>Ziporyn says of this passage, “the Heavenly definitively means the spontaneous, while the Human means the deliberate and artificial; the two terms have definite contents, and these can be unproblematically known, and ‘the inherent powers’ belong to the Heavenly”: (Ziporyn 2020: 142 n C). Angus C. Graham takes this dialogue as representing “rationalizing tendencies” among the followers of Zhuangzi (Graham 1989: 205).

<sup>7</sup>Ziporyn also points out this connection between “Autumn Waters” and chapters 8 and 9, “which also offer a fixed definition of the content of the Heavenly inborn nature” (Ziporyn 2020: 142 n C). Labeling these chapters as representing the view of the “Primitivists” comes from Graham 2003a, who also includes parts of chapter 11 in this group. Liu Xiaogan follows the same grouping but labels them as “Anarchist” (Liu 1995: 134–143).



forming communities is good, but they must be small and have little interaction. “Autumn Waters” illustrates the same distinction around oxen, but there it seems to be an analogy for how we treat ourselves rather than a literal criterion for interaction with the external world. This way of dividing heaven and human and then privileging heaven appears in other sections of the *Zhuangzi* as well. For example, in “Fathoming Life” (Dasheng 達生), Laozi says:

Do not open up the heavenly of the human but open up the heavenly of heaven. Opening the heavenly empowers [*de* 德] life. Opening the human plunders life. Insatiably partake of the heavenly but do not neglect the human. The people will soon come to use the genuine. (Guo 1978: 638)

Such views also appear in the Inner Chapters, as in a dialogue between Kongzi and his disciple Zigong in “The Great Source as Teacher” (Dazong shi 大宗師). Kongzi says:

Odd people are odd to humans but match with heaven. Thus it is said, “Heaven’s petty person is a noble one for human beings; humanity’s noble ones are petty people for heaven.” (Guo 1978: 273)

The heavenly and the human are presented as opposite norms, such that following one leads to violating the other. It is clear in context that following heaven is the higher route.

## 4 Undermining the Division Between Heaven and Human in the *Zhuangzi*

Any of these chapters would support Xunzi’s characterization of Zhuangzi as being blinded toward heaven and ignoring the human. The relationship between heaven and human in the Inner Chapters, though, is more complex and the more substantial discussions undermine the division between heaven and human. The most important passage opens chapter 6, “The Great Source as Teacher.” It begins with the same imperative as *Failure and Success, Xunzi*, and “Autumn Floods”:

Knowing what heaven does and knowing what humans do – this is utmost! Knowing what heaven does: it is by heaven that there is life. Knowing what humans do: using what their knowledge knows to nourish what their knowledge does not know, living out their heavenly years and not dying short in the middle of the way. This is the flourishing of knowledge. (Guo 1978: 224)

Heaven is explained in terms of *sheng* 生, which could mean what is so by birth or could refer to the generative processes of nature. The human refers to accumulating knowledge, extending from what we know to what we do not know. Xunzi similarly takes accumulation as what distinguishes human actions from heaven (Perkins 2014: 208–209). In contrast, the *Zhuangzi* criticizes the attempt to extend knowledge further and further. This clear distinction of the human, though, is immediately undermined:

Even so, there is some trouble. Knowledge depends on something before it can be appropriate, and what it depends on is particularly unstable. How do I know that what I call heaven is not the human, or that what I call the human is not heaven? (Guo 1978: 225)

The basis for this doubt is here explained in general skeptical terms. The appropriateness or suitability of knowledge depends on something else (*you suodai* 有所待), but that something else is not fixed in a stable form (*weiding* 未定). Thus, the conditions that would determine the appropriateness of knowledge make that knowledge unstable. The instability of the division between heaven and human also has a more specific basis. In fact, there is a contradiction in Xunzi's account of Zhuangzi – if heaven and human are clearly distinguished, how can heaven serve as the norm for human beings? Doesn't that very possibility imply that one must be both human and heaven?<sup>8</sup> In the above dialogue, the question is not whether what we take as heaven might not be heaven or what we take as human might not be human but rather, how do we know that what we take as the human is not [also] heaven? How do we know that what we take as heaven is not [also] human? The problem may be deliberately emphasized in its description of the flourishing of knowledge, which does not represent excess and imbalance but simply living out one's natural life span, which is, perhaps ironically, described as one's natural or heavenly years (*tiannian* 天年). If attaining one's heavenly years is the flourishing of knowing, can we call that unnatural?

This problem is the focus of a passage that appears near the end of chapter 5, "Fragmentations Betokening Full Virtuosity" (Dechongfu 德充符). It begins with the claim that sagely people side with heaven rather than the human:

Thus, sagely people have where they wander and they take knowledge as disaster, promises as glue, virtue as connections, and skill as business. Sagely people do not scheme, so what use is wisdom? They do not chop, so what use is glue? They have no loss, so what use is virtue? They do not sell, so what use is business? These four are heavenly nourishment; heavenly nourishment is heavenly food. Since they receive food from heaven, what use are humans! (Guo 1978: 216)

Sagely people are nourished by heaven, and thus they have no need of the human. The human is explicated through the tools required for forcing the world to be a certain way. In contrast, taking nourishment from heaven is going along with the world as it is, wandering free and easy (*you* 遊). With such an orientation, one does not need wisdom for scheming or business for selling, glue to repair what has been chopped or virtue to overcome what has been lost. The human can be seen as what disrupts and coerces the natural course of things. Once again, though, there is a problem. The one who eats from heaven and has no use for the human – isn't that person still human? The passage continues:

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<sup>8</sup>In explaining why the *Zhuangzi* undermines the distinction between heaven and human, David B. Wong writes, "full detachment from the human is to treat as absolute the dichotomy between the human and Heaven. It is simply to reverse the likes and dislikes, and this is again to be the captive of a narrowing perspective" (Wong 2009, 571).

They have human form [*renzhixing* 人之形] but do not have essential human emotion [*renzhiqing* 人之情]. Having human form, they flock with humans. Not having human emotions, judgments of right and wrong [*shifei* 是非] do not get to their body/self. They are fine in their smallness, so they are grouped with humans. They are great in their bigness, completing their heaven in singularity! (Guo 1978: 216)

They are human in the sense that they have human form or human bodies, but they are not human in that they lack essential human emotions, *qing* 情. In this context, *qing* usually refers to affective responses that arise when our natural dispositions, our *xing*, are stimulated by events in the world. To say that they lack human *qing* is to imply that they lack human *xing*, and if our *xing* is what defines us, then they have human form but are not truly human. As Mengzi says: “One who lacks a heart of compassion and concern is not human!” (2A6).<sup>9</sup> The passage continues into a dialogue between Zhuangzi and Huizi, in which Huizi challenges the claim that one could be human without essential human emotions. The dialogue continues:

Zhuangzi said, “*Dao* gives them an appearance, heaven gives them a form – why can you not call them human?” Huizi said, “Since you call them human, how can they not have essential human emotions?” Zhuangzi said, “Judgments of right and wrong are what I refer to as essential human emotions. What I call lacking those emotions refers to people not using loves and hates inside to harm their body/person, instead constantly relying on what is so of itself and not adding to life.” Huizi said, “Not adding to life, then how do they have their body?” Zhuangzi said, “The way gives them an appearance, heaven gives them a form, they do not let loves and hates in to harm their bodies. Now you externalize your spirit and labor your essence, leaning on a tree and sighing, resting on a table and blinking. Heaven gave you a form and you use it to chirp about hard and white!” (Guo 1978: 221-22)

Adding to life is precisely what is rejected in terms of scheming, chopping, and so on. The opposite state is to follow along with or rely on (*yin* 因) what is simply so of itself, *ziran* 自然. That would be the nourishment of heaven. What differentiates the human in these passages is the role of loving and hating, which is bound up with judgments of right and wrong. Such discriminating judgments cause us harm and alienate us from heaven. For Mengzi or Xunzi, giving up these emotions and judgments is abandoning the human, and Xunzi says that the result is a focus only on going along with things (*yin*). In these chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, though, this state of going along unites the human and the heavenly. The distinction between heaven and human is further blurred by the fact that our (human) form and appearance are given by heaven and *dao*. If humans arise from heaven, then how can the human not also be heavenly? We can now return to the passage that starts “The Great Source as Teacher.” Its doubts about the division between heaven and human are addressed by appeal to genuine human beings (*zhenren* 真人): “Moreover, there will be genuine knowing only after there are genuine humans” (Guo 1978: 226). That leads into a long account of genuine human beings that twice invokes the distinction between heaven and human. The first says:

One whose tastes and desires are deep is shallow in heaven’s mechanism. The genuine human beings of the past did not know to approve of living or to detest dying. They came

<sup>9</sup>References to the *Mengzi* are based on the Chinese text in Jiao 1987.

out without delight and they entered back without resistance. They were at ease in going and were at ease in coming, that's all. They did not forget what begins it and did not seek what ends it. Receiving they enjoyed it, losing they returned it. This is called not using the heart to harm *dao*, not using the human to aid heaven. These are called genuine human beings. (Guo 1978: 228-29)

In terms of “Fragmentations Betokening Full Virtuosity,” the genuine person could be described as one who relies on what is so of itself and does not add to life. That involves freedom from deep desires, from preferences about life and death, and from attachment to what one has. All of these are opposed to the heavenly mechanism (*tianji* 天機), equivalent to heavenly nourishment. While this seems to privilege heaven, the passage ends by once again undermining the distinction itself:

Thus, that which they loved was oneness and that which they did not love was oneness. Their oneness was one and their non-oneness was one. Their oneness makes them followers of heaven. Their non-oneness makes them followers of humans. Heaven and human not conquering each other – that is we call a genuine human being. (Guo 1978: 234)

Seeing the unity in all things makes one a follower of heaven, while seeing the world as individuated makes one a follower of the human. One who is genuinely human is both heavenly and human, not letting one displace the other. That fact that both the oneness and non-oneness are one, though, cautions against anything more than a provisional distinction.

The attempt to undermine the distinction between heaven and human is not confined to the inner chapters. The most fully articulated account occurs in chapter 23, “Gengsang Chu” (庚桑楚). The second half of that chapter consists of a long essay that is particularly sophisticated and complex. One of the main concerns is the relationship between heaven and human:

Sagely people are skillful with heaven but clumsy with the human. Now to be skillful with heaven and excellent with the human – only a person who is whole can do that. Only an insect can insect. Only an insect can heaven. The person who is whole detests “heaven” and detests “the heaven of humans” – how much more “I am heaven!” “I am human!” (Guo 1978: 813)

The claim that sages are skillful with heaven but clumsy with the human fits the position that Xunzi attributes to Zhuangzi and it resembles the line from “The Great Source as Teacher,” that the odd person of heaven is normal to humans, and the person of heaven is odd to human beings. In this chapter, that privileging of heaven is only second best. The highest attainment is the *quanren* 全人 who is good with both heaven and human. That is a person who is wholly intact. The final line is difficult to interpret, but it must refer not to hating heaven and human but hating the attempt to label and distinguish them.<sup>10</sup> The reference to insects is perplexing, as reflected in my literal translation above. It most likely means that it is precisely in being an insect that the insect is also heavenly. Thus Ziporyn translates it: “Only an insect can be an insect, and it is only by being an insect that it can succeed in being

<sup>10</sup> For discussions of this passage, see Wong 2009, 571–72, and Graham 2001, 106.

the Heavenly” (Ziporyn 2020: 192)<sup>11</sup> This interpretation is supported by the start of the essay, which connects heaven to the particularity of things:

When empty space is fully stable, the glow of heaven issues forth. In the issuing forth of the glow of heaven, human beings manifest their humanness and things manifest their thingness. (Guo 1978: 791)

The connection between heaven and what defines a thing is explicated later with reference to natural dispositions, *xing*:

*Dao* is the flourishing of virtuosity;  
Life is the core of virtuosity;  
Dispositions are the material of life;  
The movement of the dispositions is called action [*wei* 為];  
The artifice that belongs to action [*wei zhi wei* 為之偽] is called loss.  
Knowing is contact; knowing is scheming. What knowing does not know is like a glance.  
Acting by what you cannot help doing is called virtuosity. Acting without anything other than the self is called order. The names are opposite but the facts fit together. (Guo 1978: 810)

Uniting heaven and human through natural dispositions appears in the Primitivist chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, as well as in the philosophy of Mengzi (e.g. 7A1). Here, what leads to loss is not the spontaneous actions arising from the stimulation of those dispositions but rather the artifice or deliberate striving that arises as a further step from those actions. The term used for artifice is the same *wei* 偽 used positively by Xunzi for the human effort that allows us to manage the dangers of our spontaneous responses. In “Gengsang Chu,” the break with natural actions arises through desires and concerns with external things and from taking contextual judgments of right and wrong as absolute, more specifically, using one’s own context as a standard to judge all others. These lead us not just beyond the heavenly but also beyond the human. That is why one need only let actions issue from the authentic self (*chengji* 誠己) (Guo 1978: 794).

## 5 The Heavenly and the Non-human

The explicit juxtaposition of heaven and human was an inherited formulation that the *Zhuangzi* both invokes and undermines. As the latter suggests, the juxtaposition itself is somewhat out of place in the text, particularly in its anthropocentrism. That may be why “Gengsang Chu” uses an insect as an example: what makes us think the issue is the division between heaven and human rather than the division between heaven and insect? This final section will consider heaven and human outside their

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<sup>11</sup> James Legge follows the same interpretation, translating it: “Only an insect can play the insect, only an insect can show the insect nature” (Legge 1891). In contrast, Burton Watson has: “Only bugs can be bugs because only bugs abide by Heaven” (Watson 1967) That is possible but makes little sense as a claim.

explicit juxtaposition. Given the diversity of views within the *Zhuangzi* as a whole, I will restrict myself to the Inner Chapters.

It is well known that while the *Laozi* displaces heaven in favor of *dao* as the ultimate, heaven plays a central role in the *Zhuangzi*, but heaven is used as an adjective or adverb more than as a standalone noun. Aside from proper names like the “Heavenly Pool” (*tianchi* 天池) to which the giant bird Peng flies or “Heavenly Root” (*tiangen* 天根), a person who wanders the world asking how one should act, we find heavenly piping (*tianlai* 天籟), the heavenly pottery wheel (*tianjun* 天鈞), heavenly palace (*tianfu* 天府), heavenly transitions or heavenly equality (*tianni* 天倪), heavenly patterns (*tianli* 天理), heavenly years (*tiannian* 天年), heavenly nourishment (*tianyu* 天鬻), heavenly food (*tianshi* 天食), and heavenly mechanism (*tianji* 天機). The use of heaven as a modifier suggests a reinterpretation of heaven from a being or element of the world toward a way of occurring and arising.<sup>12</sup> In a few cases, *tian* could be translated as natural or naturally, as “heavenly years” seems to refer to one’s natural lifespan, but that does not apply in most of the cases. The heavenly nourishment discussed earlier, for example, is a matter of going along with things as they are, not adding to life or forcing the world into our desires and categories. It does not refer to the natural in a sense of organic food or living a simple life without technology, that is, it is not positing the naturalness of the Primitivist chapters.

This adverbial use of heaven is clearest in the discussion of the “heavenly piping” at the start of chapter two. In the dialogue, Ziqi distinguishes human piping, earthly piping, and heavenly piping. Human piping is human beings using instruments to produce music. Earthly piping refers to the sounds produced by the wind when it blows across the contours of the land. The sounds that arise are chaotically diverse yet harmonious, arising not from either the land or the wind alone but rather through their interaction. Ziqi then explains:

Now, blowing the ten thousand differences, making them just themselves. Each takes of itself, so who is it who rouses it? (Guo 1978: 50)

The line is remarkably difficult to translate, containing several odd formulations.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis is on diversity and immanence. What is blown is not grammatically a noun but literally would be “ten-thousand not being similars.” What the blowing

<sup>12</sup> Ziporyn emphasizes this adverbial sense in explaining his translation of *tian*: “Since the term no longer refers to a particular agent but to a quality or aspect of purposeless and agentless process present in all existents, it is here often translated as ‘the Heavenly’ rather than the substantive ‘Heaven’” (Ziporyn 2020: 286). Kim-Chong Chong points out the binomial use of *tian*, saying that they “express a non-judgmental attitude toward human affairs in general, as opposed to the Confucian and Mohist standards said to be laid down by *tian* with a moral will” (Chong 2016: 81), and that they “are used in opposition to any artificially fixed conception of things” (Chong 2016: 59).

<sup>13</sup> Ziporyn translates the lines: “It is the gusting through all the ten thousand differences that yet causes all of them to come only from themselves. For since every last identity is only what some one of them picks out from it, what identity can there be for their rouser?” (Ziporyn 2020: 12). For a discussion of the lines, see Ziporyn 2020: 23 n E.

does is make (*shi* 使) things happen of themselves (*zi* 自). We might say it causes them to be uncaused, or to have no cause beyond their own spontaneity. Does that mean there is something that makes it so, or not? In his commentary on the passage, Guo Xiang provides a helpful account of heaven:

Since nothing is just nothing, it cannot give birth to something. Before something comes alive, it cannot already be alive. So then who gives life to living? Suddenly, it gives life to itself. Giving life to itself is not me giving life. Since I cannot give life to things, things also cannot give life to me. Thus I am so of myself (*ziran* 自然). Being so of myself then is called being so by heaven (*tianran* 天然). What is so by heaven is not *done*, so one uses heaven to speak of it, in order to illuminate its self-so spontaneity [*ziran*] – how could it refer to some blueness up above! But some say that the piping of heaven compels things to follow it and serve it. Now heaven cannot even possess itself [*ziyou* 自有], how could it possess other things! Thus, heaven is a general name for the ten thousand things. (Guo 1978: 50)

Guo Xiang makes the move from a nominal to an adverbial heaven explicit. Heaven is not a thing at all but rather a description for how things arise without a controller, its adverbial status made clear in the phrase *tianran* 天然, heavenly-so. That is then equated with *ziran* 自然, the self-so spontaneity of things. Guo Xiang might go too far in resolving what the *Zhuangzi* itself leaves as a question, but the use of heaven to describe the spontaneous arising of things is a key meaning of the term. That seems to be the emphasis in the phrase *tianji* 天機, the heavenly trigger or mechanism, which occurs in the description of the genuine people who do not allow the heavenly or the human to overcome each other. Other descriptive senses of heaven can be seen as extensions from this basic equation of heaven with spontaneous arising. For example, chapter two describes the “heavenly palace” (*tianfu* 天府) as that which cannot be filled or used up (Guo 1978: 83). That leads toward seeing the evenness of all things in their self-arising:

By this, sagely people harmonize them with right and wrong and rest in the heavenly pottery wheel (*tianjun* 天鈞). This is called walking both ways. (Guo 1978: 69)

The phrase *tianni* 天倪 at the end of “Equalizing Assessments of Things” has a similar function in allowing for harmony through realizing the equality of all things.<sup>14</sup> Since human beings also arise by self-so spontaneity, embracing the heavenly cannot be a rejection of the human, but only of the human tendency to resist that spontaneity through deep desires and cravings, fixed labels of right and wrong, or allowing loves and hates to get in to harm us. That is why sages can be human in having human form and human friends, but also take their nourishment from heaven, or why genuine human beings maintain the human and heavenly in balance. We could say that deep desires and fixed judgments alienate us not only from heaven but also from what is genuinely human. And yet only exceptional people reach this stage, people who are genuine or whole. Normal people act deliberately, judge

<sup>14</sup> The meaning of *ni* is impossible to determine with any certainty. Ziporyn translates the phrase as “Heavenly Transitions” (Ziporyn 2020: 21), Watson 1967 as “Heavenly Equality,” and Chen 1983 as “natural limits.” Graham takes *ni* as *yan* 研, meaning “whetstone” (Graham 2003b: 16) but there is little evidence for that reading.



things as right or wrong, and suffer from deep desires. Thus the text can simultaneously critique the human (as the way most human beings are) and advocate being genuinely human (as spontaneously enacting a human form).

The critique of the human, though, often relates not to being human but to *the idea* of being human. This criticism primarily follows along two lines. One attacks the value placed on being human, criticizing anthropocentrism. This theme runs throughout the *Zhuangzi*. One of the most direct statements is in a dialogue between Wang Ni and Nie Que. Wang Ni gives a list of questions about norms, asking, for example:

Monkeys take gibbons as partners, bucks exchange with does, loaches play with fish. Mao Qiang and Lady Li are what people consider beautiful, but if fish saw them they would enter the depths, if birds saw them they would fly high, and if deer saw them they would dash away. Of these four, which knows the world's correct beauty? (Guo 1978: 93)

This rejection of human exceptionalism means that we should not be attached to our existence as human. In a discussion among four friends, the one who is dying says:

Now the great clump burdens me with form, labors me with life, rests me with old age, and ends me with death. Thus approving my living as good is that by which I approve my dying as good. Now when a great forger smelts metal, if the metal leaps up and says, "I must be a Mo Ya!" the great forger will surely consider it inauspicious metal! Now to once meet with human form and say, "Only human! Only human!" – the change maker will surely consider such a one to be an inauspicious human. Now if you take heaven and earth as a great oven and take the making of changes as a great forger, then where would you go and not be okay?" (Guo 1978: 263)

The problem in this passage is not with being human but with being *attached* to being human. That attachment causes worry and fear, leading into the attempt to add to life rather than go along with change. To be attached to one's status as a human being is to violate the spontaneous forming and un-forming of all things.

The second way in which the idea of the human becomes a problem is in generating a generic norm that would apply to all people. While Mengzi evaluates individuals in relation to generic and universal human dispositions, the *Zhuangzi* points out all the odd forms that human beings take – some missing feet, some horrendously ugly, some with twisted forms that prevent them from being useful to society. After being criticized by Kongzi for having lost a foot, Shushan No-Toes says:

There is nothing heaven does not cover and nothing the earth does not bear. Master, I took you to be like heaven and earth – how could I know the master was like this! (Guo 1978: 202)

When reflecting on this encounter later with No-Toes, Laozi suggests:

Why didn't you have him take life and death as one line and take okay and not okay as on one string, releasing his handcuffs and fetters? Could that be done? (Guo 1978: 205)

No-Toes says that Kongzi cannot be released, because he has been punished by heaven (*tian xing zhi* 天刑之). Another one-legged character, when asked for an explanation for his condition, says: "It was heaven, not human. Heaven in generating a this, makes it singular. The appearances of humans have what is given. By this I know it was heaven, not human" (Guo 1978: 124). Heaven produces each thing as a singularity. It is human beings who then impose conformity. This character could

be saying that he was born with one foot and it is only human beings who go on to label him as defective by comparison, but the use of one-footed characters elsewhere in the text suggests a more complex point. If the foot was lost as a punishment, then the immediate cause would have been human beings.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, the oddness of having only one foot would be the result of being punished by other human beings for his original non-conformity. In these passages, the problem is not with being human but rather with the way that the concept of the human interferes with being whatever one happens to be at the moment. If you find yourself to be a butterfly, you happily flit and flutter as a butterfly. If at this moment you happen to be some particular human being, enjoy that role while you can.

## 6 Conclusion

How justified is Xunzi's criticism that Zhuangzi saw only heaven and neglected the human, thereby only advocating going along with things? All of the passages discussed here draw some contrast between the heavenly and the human and then use the heavenly to critique what is usually taken as the human. In all cases, the appeal to heaven frees us from common aspects of human life. And yet, the human is never entirely rejected. The disagreements within the *Zhuangzi* are around where to draw that line between the acceptable and unacceptable aspects of human life. In the Primitivist chapters, the line is between natural actions like ploughing or weaving and unnatural actions that disrupt the harmony and sustainability of the natural world. In "Fragmentations Betokening Full Virtuosity," it is between having human form and appearance and having fixed human emotions. In many cases, it is between the spontaneous reactions of our natural dispositions and fixed concepts, judgments, and ambitions. The "Gengsang Chu" chapter includes action (*wei* 為) on the side of what is acceptable but rejects the effort or artifice (*wei* 偽) that arises from it. If we consider the *Zhuangzi* as a whole to be a collection of writings by different people with related concerns and assumptions, then one of the main issues on which they disagreed was on where to draw the line between heaven and human. That goes along with the other issue Xunzi raises – to what degree is it human to change the world rather than go along with it? These disagreements reflect a fundamental philosophical problem – human beings seem to be unique, particularly in their ability to cause trouble for themselves, for others, and for nature, but human beings also seem to arise from natural processes in the same way as any other animal. Both the *Xunzi* and the *Zhuangzi* are concerned with pinpointing just where the heavenly or the natural crosses over to the distinctively human. Since the *Xunzi* takes what goes

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<sup>15</sup> This reading is taken by Cheng Xuanying, who takes it as showing that even human actions are ultimately fated and can be attributed to heaven (Guo 1978: 125–26). Chong suggests the same reading by saying that *tian* and *ming* describe events that are beyond our control, whether they are natural or caused by other people (Chong 2016: 67). This is another dimension in which the division between heaven and human cannot be taken as absolute.

beyond the natural or heavenly as precisely what defines us as human, to reject it is to reject the human. That seems to be the case in some passages of the *Zhuangzi* as well, at least rhetorically, as we saw earlier in Sect. 3. Other passages, though, claim that what exceeds the natural or heavenly also exceeds the human. It is artificial or fake. That is why only one who stays within the heavenly can be a *zhenren* 真人, a genuine human being.

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# Chapter 6

## The Multi-level Structure of “Transformation” and the Philosophy of “Transformation of Things” in the *Zhuangzi*



Masayuki Sato

### 1 Introduction

I have previously examined the development of the concepts “change (*bian* 變),” “transformation (*hua* 化),” and “change and transformation (*bianhua* 變化)” from the Warring States Period to the Early Han Period. This led me to discover that, in the minds of thinkers after the Warring States Period, the importance of the concept of “change and transformation” gradually increased. This is seen in the explication in *Mr. Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋) of “understanding transformation (*zhi hua* 知化)”; in the *Xunzi*’s “sincerity/co-creativity (*cheng* 誠)” —the moral excellence to master the ever-changing process of moralization of mind and body of an agent (i.e., ideal ruler)—which “cause[s] change and transformation of [the human and natural world] in turn (*bianhua daixing* 變化代興)”; and in the *Xicizhuan* 繫辭傳 commentary’s thought formation centered on the theory of “change and transformation” (Sato 2005: 51–86). During the Han Period, Sima Qian in “The Biographies of Laozi and Han Fei” categorizes the thought of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Shen Buhai, and Han Fei as “originated from the idea of ‘the Way and its virtue (*daode* 道德),’” but praises Laozi as “most profound among all of them.” Interestingly, Sima Qian’s appraisal of Laozi as “most profound” stems from Laozi being a thinker who understood change and transformation. In summarizing Laozi’s life, Sima Qian writes: “[The theory of ] Li Er’s 李耳 (i.e., Laozi) thought is [based upon] the idea [that] Non-doing can cause self-transformation, which leads one to

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I wish to thank Michael Rau 饒忠恕 for his help in translating and editing.

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make oneself tranquil and right.”<sup>1</sup> Summarizing the entire chapter, Sima Qian again writes: “By means of esteeming ideas of the Way, voidness and nothingness, Laozi could respond to change and transformation in the process of non-doing.” Clearly, Sima Qian’s appraisal of Laozi’s thought is centered on “(change and) transformation.”

By comparison, in his “Biographies of Laozi and Han Fei,” although Sima Qian also describes Zhuangzi’s work,<sup>2</sup> life, and philosophy, he does not mention Zhuangzi in relation to “change and transformation.” Sima Qian’s appraisal of Zhuangzi’s philosophy is well known: “The essence of Zhuangzi’s argument can be attributed to the words of Laozi, [...] and has elucidated the skill [for practicing the ideal] of Laozi.” He even concluded that “Zhuangzi has diffused [Laozi’s doctrine of] the Way and its virtue and freely expressed his fantastic arguments, but the essence [of his thought], can also be attributed to the idea that [existence and presence of] everything is spontaneous.” According to Sima Qian, Zhuangzi’s philosophy was built upon Laozi’s. Zhuangzi developed Laozi’s ideas of Way and Virtue in a scattered manner (*san daode* 散道德) and proposed returning spontaneously to the origin.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the text of the *Laozi*, which has also been called *Daodejing* 道德經, mentions two instances of “transformation”: “Myriad things transform themselves [by their own spontaneous power]” (Chapter 37) and “By means of [my virtuous power] of doing nothing, the people will also be [spontaneously] transformed of themselves [into being virtuous]” (Chapter 57). Evidently for Sima Qian, who was already able to read the text of the *Laozi*, the idea of “self-transformation” or transformation by its own power (*zihua* 自化) was nothing other than Laozi’s philosophy, and it was Zhuangzi who developed Laozi’s theories of “Way and Virtue” and “spontaneity.”

We cannot know whether Sima Qian was ignorant of the many important uses of the term “transformation” in the *Zhuangzi* or whether he knew of them but considered Zhuangzi’s theory of “transformation” to be merely the extension of Laozi’s “be transformed of themselves.” Yet if we consider the uses of the term in Warring States and Qin-Han texts, it is evident that, among the pre-Qin period texts currently available to us, the term “transformation” appears most often in the *Zhuangzi*, a total of 91 times. This is followed by *Guanzi* (75), *Xunzi* (74), and *Mr. Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals* (66). By comparison, not once does the *Analects* use the term

<sup>1</sup> In order to abide by the current publication’s Romanization requirements while maximizing readability, I have taken the liberty of adjusting the Romanization of quoted proper nouns without adding square brackets where changes have been made. All further adjustments will not be specifically noted.

<sup>2</sup> All translations from the *Zhuangzi* in this chapter are adopted from Martin Palmer and Elizabeth Breuilly’s *The Book of Chuang Tzu* (London: Penguin Books, 1996). I indicate the page number of each citation. When there have been significant differences in textual understanding between theirs and mine, I have modified the translation, noting the modification with the phrase “with modification.”

<sup>3</sup> The author has previously discussed the chief characteristics of Zhuangzi’s understanding of “Way and Virtue (*daode* 道德)” and its possible influence on Xunzi’s understanding of *daode*. (Sato 2013: 61–110)7.

“transformation.” *Mozi* and *Mencius* only use the term five times each. *Hanfeizi*, a representative work from the Late Warring States Period, only uses the term 25 times, or less than one-third of the total uses of the term in the *Zhuangzi*. *Guanzi* and *Mr. Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals* use the term more often than the *Hanfeizi*. But, given that these two texts are part of a series and larger to begin with, we can know that the number of appearances of the term “transformation” in the *Zhuangzi* and *Xunzi* is especially notable.

Based on this, this chapter analyzes all the uses of the terms “transformation (*hua* 化),” “change (*bian* 變),” “the transformation of things (*wuhua* 物化),” “change and transformation (*bianhua* 變化),” and other related terms and proposes a four-fold categorization of Zhuangzi’s theory of “transformation”: (1) the transformation of organisms, (2) the transformation between life and death and different organisms, (3) the transformation of perception, and (4) the transformation of all things imaginable. Next, this chapter discusses the meaning of these four categories and the function each plays in Zhuangzi’s description of “transformation.” Perhaps because the term “the transformation of things” is unique to the *Zhuangzi*, past research has tended to discuss only “the transformation of things” from the story “*Zhuang Zhou mengdie* 莊周夢蝶” (Zhuang Zhou’s butterfly dream, hereafter “butterfly dream”) in the *Qiwulun* 齊物論 (Equality of All Things) chapter as its example.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, this chapter will first distill the central characteristics of all uses of “transformation” and “the transformation of things” to clarify the meaning of *Qiwulun*’s “the transformation of things” in the larger context of Zhuangzi’s theory of “transformation.” In doing so, this chapter argues that *Qiwulun*’s theory of “the transformation of things” belongs to the aforementioned fourth category of “transformation.” Furthermore, the author of the *Qiwulun* primarily uses this fourth category of “transformation” to link together “things” from different times, spaces, modes of existence, and levels of understanding. Aside from the four types of meaning mentioned above, the *Zhuangzi*’s concept of “transformation” also has two important functions: (1) the change or development of subjects and arguments from individual paragraph level to comprehensive whole chapter level, and (2) the synthesis of initially distinct subjects into more integrated ones. These two functions of the concept of “transformation” display the unique, multilevel meaning of the *Zhuangzi*’s “the transformation of things.” In this way, Zhuangzi’s multifaceted, multilayered theory of “transformation” becomes the foundation for his characteristic idea that “because all things transform into other things, different things are all one thing.” In this way, the “the transformation of things” also becomes the foundation for Zhuangzi’s idea that “all things are equal (*wanwu qitong* 萬物齊同).”

Before diving into detailed analysis, it may be helpful to list the uses of “the transformation of things” in the *Zhuangzi* and other texts from the Warring States

<sup>4</sup> More on this below. Mei-Yen Lee 李美燕 divides into three types previous research on Zhuangzi’s “the equality of all things.” Wei-Ling Su 蘇韋菱 has provided a concise summary of the history of interpretation starting with Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 from this passage’s “the transformation of things”. But they are strictly concerned with the meaning of “the transformation of things” in “the butterfly dream.” (Lee 1997: 355–370; Su 2011: 1–26).

Period to Qin-Han Period. Note that “the transformation of things” appears in the *Zhuangzi* seven times. The compounded instances of *wuhua* 物化 (hereafter “the transformation of things”) appear three times in the chapters *Qiwulun*, *Tiandao* 天道 (Heaven’s Way), and *Keyi* 刻意 (With Intent). As mentioned above, “the equality of things” appears in the conclusion of *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream.” The uses in *Tiandao* and *Keyi* appear in the phrase *siyewuhua* 死也物化 (hereafter “death is the transformation of things”). The other four instances involve the phrase *yuwuhua* 與物化 (one changes as [surrounding] things change). These uses are not focused on “things” as their subject. Rather, through this sentence pattern, the author is discussing whether the “subject” (e.g., oneself) and “object” (e.g., things or external environment) will interrelate with each other in their process of transformation.<sup>5</sup>

At this point, we can note that in current editions of the *Zhuangzi*, aside from instances of “the transformation of things,” there are 91 instances of the term “transformation (*hua* 化),” the most among any singular existing Pre-Qin text.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, there are 47 instances of the term “change (*bian* 變),” several of which can be used interchangeably with “transformation.” As such, one can see how relying on *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream” alone is clearly insufficient for understanding the complexities of Zhuangzi’s theory of “the transformation of things,” especially given the *Zhuangzi*’s abundant use of the concepts “transformation” and “change.” Aside from analyzing all instances of “the transformation of things,” we must carefully observe the individual uses of the concepts “transformation” and “change” in the *Zhuangzi*.

## 2 The Transformation of Organisms

The term “transformation” in “the transformation of organisms” refers to the change experienced by some organism or part of it. More uniquely, the *Zhuangzi* uses the concept to describe instances in which an organism is radically different after it transforms, becoming a different species or even something inorganic (e.g., human→object). This meaning of “transformation” is found primarily in *Dazongshi* 大宗師 (The Great and Original Teacher) of the Inner Chapters and in *Zhile* 至樂 (Perfect Happiness) of the Outer Chapters. There are fewer instances of this meaning in the Miscellaneous Chapters. The following analysis will focus on the two chapters *Dazongshi* and *Zhile* to unpack the meaning and significance of the “the transformation of organisms.”

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the uses of “the transformation of things” in texts other than *Zhuangzi*, other than the three instances in *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經 which refer to the changes in one’s body, the six instances in *Liezi*, *Wenzi*, and *Huainanzi* are substantially similar to the three uses of “the transformation of things” in *Zhuangzi*.

<sup>6</sup> The term also appears twice in two chapter names, *Qiwulun* 齊物論 (The Equality of All Things) and *Waiwu* 外物 (Affected from Outside).



First, *Dazongshi* discusses four main topics: (1) “true man (*zhenren* 真人), (2) “the Way (*dao* 道),”<sup>7</sup> (3) the theory of “the transformation (of things),” and (4) “sit and forget (*zuowang* 坐忘).” *Dazongshi* primarily develops its discussion of “the transformation of organisms” in four sequential stories beginning with “The Masters, Si, Yu, Li, and Lai, said to one another” (hereafter “Master Si”), “Masters Sang Hu, Meng Zifan, Qin Zhang, three good friends” (hereafter “Master Sang Hu”), “Yan Hui asked Confucius,” “Yierzi 意而子 said to Xu You 許由” (hereafter “Yierzi”).<sup>8</sup> *Zhile* discusses “the transformation of things” in six stories beginning with “Is it possible anywhere in this whole wide world to have perfect happiness or not,” “Zhuangzi’s wife died,” “Uncle Legless and Uncle Cripple were touring the area of the Hill of the Dark Prince” (hereafter “Uncle Legless”), “Zhuangzi went to Chu to see an ancient desiccated skull,” “Yan Yuan went east to Qi,” and “Liezi saw a one-hundred-year-old skull” (pp. 149–154). Three stories—“Zhuangzi’s wife died,” “Uncle Legless,” “Liezi saw a one-hundred-year-old skull”—contain the central features of this chapter’s theory of “transformation.” But the “the transformation of organisms” is found most clearly in the story of “Uncle Legless.” The style and content of this passage is similar to *Dazongshi*’s “Master Si” and “Master Sang Hu.” This indicates all three likely were derived from the same source. In particular, *Dazongshi*’s “Master Si” and *Zhile*’s “Uncle Legless” have the most similar narrative structure and content. Similarly, multiple interlocutors appear in *Dazongshi*’s “Master Sang Hu,” with one interlocutor having undergone “transformation.” This pattern is seen also in *Dazongshi*’s “Master Si” and *Zhile*’s “Uncle Legless.” However, “Master Sang Hu” also manifests an “anti-ritual” bent. In fact, this “anti-ritual” bent is supported by this passage’s reflections on “the transformation of things.”<sup>9</sup> Below, we will discuss “the transformation of organisms” in *Dazongshi*’s “Master Si.”

In *Dazongshi*’s account of “Master Si,” Masters Si, Yu, Li, and Lai become friends. But Masters Yu and Lai contract terrible illnesses, resulting in dramatic physical changes: “My back is like a hunchback’s, and all my organs are on top

<sup>7</sup>The passage following the explication of the true man begins with “Death and birth are fixed. They are as certain as the dawn that comes after the night, established by the decree of Heaven.” Aside from discussing the concept “true,” it also contains reflection on “the Way.” It also uses language reminiscent of “the transformation of things” like “how things are (*wuzhiqing* 物之情)” and “assimilating oneself into the Way (*hua qidao* 化其道).” Thus, this passage can be said to be the synthesis of the themes “true man,” “the Way,” and “the transformation of things.”

<sup>8</sup>However, the passage beginning with “Death and birth are fixed” (p. 49) following the description of the “true man” can also be categorized under “the transformation of things” since it uses terms like “how things are (*wuzhiqing* 物之情),” “the universe of possible forms (*wanhua* 萬化),” “lasting things (*hengwu* 恆物),” “all things *wanwu* (萬物),” “origin of all that changes (*yihua* 一化),” etc. Only, here, “the Way (*dao* 道)” replaces “the Maker of All (*zaowuzhe* 造物者).” This may be why the author of *Dazongshi* did not put this passage alongside the later passages on “the transformation of things.”

<sup>9</sup>Immediately preceding the story of “Uncle Legless,” the story of “Zhuangzi’s wife died” also contains “anti-ritual” elements (“Zhuangzi’s bashing a battered tub and singing”) and is similar in structure to *Dazongshi*’s “Master Sang Hu” (more on this later).

while my chin is lost in my navel and my shoulders rise up above my head and my topknot points to Heaven!” (pp. 52–53). Similarly, *Zhile* records the story of Uncles Legless and Cripple, detailing when a willow tree suddenly grows up out of Uncle Cripple’s left elbow. Master Yu, Master Lai, and Uncle Cripple are all astonished by their respective transformations. Master Yu says, “Goodness me! The Maker of All has made me completely deformed!” (p. 53). Master Lai says, “If Heaven and Earth are like a furnace and Nature is the craftsman, then is it possible he could send me anywhere that was not appropriate? Peacefully we die, calmly we awake” (p. 54). In *Zhile*, Uncle Cripple says, “Death and birth are like the morning and the night. You and I, Sir, observe the ways of transformation and now I am being transformed.” (p. 151). In these stories, Master Yu and Uncle Cripple each undergo a “transformation of things.” When asked whether they dislike the “transformation of things” they have experienced, each replies, “No, what should I dislike?” Master Lai even praises the Maker of All, saying, “How great is the Maker of All!” (p. 153). Here, the “Maker of All” altogether controls the bodily changes, life, and death of every individual.

This tone is echoed in *Dazongshi*’s stories of “Master Sang Hu” and “Yierzi.” Using Confucius as a spokesman, the author of “Master Sang Hu” writes, “They have truly become one with the Maker of All and now wander as the original breath of Heaven and Earth. They view life as grotesque tumor, a swelling they inhabit. They view death as the removal of this growth” (p. 55).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Yierzi elsewhere says, “How can you know that the Maker of All will not remove the mark of my branding, heal my mutilation and [restore me]” (p. 57). Through Confucius and Yierzi, the author declares that the Maker of All oversees each organism’s rise and fall. The joint conclusion of these four passages—*Dazongshi*’s “Master Si,” “Master Sang Hu,” “Yierzi,” and *Zhile*’s “Uncle Legless”—is that the physical changes of every individual (i.e., “the transformation of things”) is dictated entirely by the “Maker of All.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the “Maker of All” not only controls the state of one’s physical body—both “normal” bodily states and “abnormalities” like “hunched back (*qulou* 曲僂),” “chin lost in the navel (*yiyin* 頤隱),” “shoulders above the head (*jiangao* 肩高)” —but also causes transformations between either humans and other living organisms (e.g., chickens) or living organisms and non-living organisms (e.g., crossbow, wheels).

It is not only the “Maker of All” which causes the transformation of things in humans, as *Dazongshi*’s “Yierzi” makes clear. According to “Yierzi,” the

<sup>10</sup> To fit publication requirements while maximizing readability, I have adjusted the spelling from British to American English without providing specific notation.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that, in these three passages, only *Dazongshi*’s “Master Sang Hu” clearly uses the “Maker of All (*zaowuzhe* 造物者):” “They have truly become one with the Maker of All” (p. 55). In contrast, *Dazongshi*’s “Master Si” uses “Maker [and Transformer] of All (*zaohuazhe* 造化者):” “the Maker [and Transformer] of All would view me somewhat askance” (p. 54). Meanwhile, *Zhile*’s “Uncle Legless” does not explicitly use the term, only saying, “You and I, Sir, observe the ways of transformation and now I am being transformed. So how could I dislike this?” (p. 151). From the context, however, we can infer the existence of the “Maker [and Transformer] of All.”

transformation from one bodily state to another is often accompanied by a corresponding transformation in “benevolence and justice (*renyi* 仁義)” or “right and wrong (*shifei* 是非).” However, in this passage, the moral transformation is negative. Here, Xu You argues that Yierzi has been branded by Sage Emperor Yao’s benevolence and justice and mutilated by the distinction between right and wrong. Thus, according to Xu You, Yierzi needs to rely on the Maker of All to remove the mark of branding and heal the mutilation. Here, those who practice benevolence and justice and distinguish between right and wrong are linked to harmful bodily states (e.g., branding, mutilation).

The *Zhuangzi* bases its criticism of various ethical values as harmful to humans on his theory of “the transformation of things.” These criticisms played a central role in systematically undermining the ethical debates of the Confucian and Mohist schools from the Early and Middle Warring States Period.<sup>12</sup> This is evident for two reasons. First, according to the ethical perspectives of texts predating the *Zhuangzi*, learning ethical values belongs to the level of “mind/heart (*xin* 心)” or “will (*zhi* 志)” and is not related to bodily harm. In contrast, the *Zhuangzi* argues that practicing benevolence and justice and distinguishing between right and wrong *directly* brands or mutilates the body. This perspective on “transformation” shifted Chinese philosophical discussions towards whether ethical values could directly impact bodily health. This perspective is also seen in the Outer Chapters. The *Pianmu* 駢拇 (Webbed toes) chapter records that “[t] here are many acts of kindness and justice and they are often associated with the five vital organs” (p. 66) and *Zaiyou* 在宥 (Letting things freely be) notes that “we can see [...] neither benevolence nor righteousness in the yoke and shackles of punishment” (p. 85). Taken together, these passages clearly imply that ethical values negatively impact normal bodily development. In this way, *Zhuangzi*’s theory of “the transformation of things” departs from the Confucian and Mohist perspective that ethical values primarily influence psychological states and towards their being able to influence bodily states. Accordingly, in *Dazongshi* Master Lai remarks, “[...] if I then said, ‘I must be a human, I must be a human!’, the Maker of All would view me somewhat askance!” (p. 54). This is because, when facing the Maker of All, the will impedes “the transformation of things.” This challenges the basic premises of the ethical debates over benevolence and justice, which rely heavily on the will.

Second, this theory of transformation in “Yierzi” also delivers a fatal blow to another premise of ethical debates in Zhuangzi’s day. For the *Zhuangzi*’s theory of transformation assumes that human bodies might transform into something different. Some ethical virtue may be beneficial to me today. But if who “I” am changes dramatically tomorrow, this same ethical virtue may well be worthless to the transformed “me.” By positing the existence of people who experience dramatic physical transformations, the *Zhuangzi* injects a measure of dynamism into the image of humans at the time. Thereafter, ethically-minded thinkers not only had to articulate

<sup>12</sup> Regarding how the ethical debates came to be replaced by more theoretical and practical debates during the Warring States Period, see Sato 2003 (108–162).

a virtue someone at some point in time ought to practice but also had to consider whether this virtue still applied after all possible transformations.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, from the perspective of “the transformation of organisms,” the authors of *Dazongshi* and *Zhile* argue that no one is able to escape the “transformation of things” overseen entirely by the Maker of All. So one should just willingly (in Zhuangzi’s words) “delight in the natural (*letian* 樂天)” and even take refuge in its irresistible power. Furthermore, *Dazongshi*’s “Yierzi” assumes “the transformation of organisms” and argues that practicing benevolence and justice and distinguishing between right and wrong harms the body. This, in turn, becomes the foundation for criticizing Confucian and Mohist ethical debates, shifting the ethical debates of the time from their singular focus on the heart/mind and will to one which would consider the transformation of the body.

### 3 The Transformation Between Life and Death and Different Organisms

The *Zhuangzi* uses the term *si* 死 (death) a total of 180 times. Among the Pre-Qin texts available to us, this places the *Zhuangzi* second in total frequency. But the significance of the *Zhuangzi*’s discussion of death is not limited to the number of times the text uses the term. It also offers deeper analysis where other texts only offer shallower discussions. For example, “death” appears most often in *Guanzi* (224 times) but is usually limited to discussing the basic fact that everyone dies. In the *Hanfeizi*, death is most often discussed in the context of punishments.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the *Zhuangzi*’s discussion of death has four defining characteristics. First, the *Zhuangzi* discusses the fact of death. Second, it uses a variety of methods and metaphors to explain the reason for death, the process of approaching death, and the experience after death. Third, it proposes the attitude with which each person ought to face death. Fourth, whether through intimation or implication, it provides a rich vocabulary for discussing death. For example, *jin* 盡 (exhaust/come to end) in “doesn’t life exhaust until death” (*Qiwulun*), *ru* 入 (enter/return) in “there is nothing that does not return,” *wang* 往 (departure) in “of its departure there is no sign,” and *gui* 歸 (return) in “back at long last to the Great Returning” (*Zhibeiyou* 知北遊 (Knowledge Strolled North)). Additionally, there are ten uses of the term “transform”

<sup>13</sup> The *Zhuangzi* criticizes virtue ethics from the perspective that “everyone has experienced change and transformation,” which involves the “transformation” of the heart. This will be explained more below.

<sup>14</sup> For example, instances of punishment and execution in the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 abound: *shesi* 赦死 (release from the death penalty) (Liao 1939: 6), *wei siyu feizui* 危死於非罪 ([truly loyal ministers will] face peril and death even though they are guilty of no fault) (Liao 1939: 6), *yueguan zesi* 越官則死 ([t]hose who overstep their offices are condemned to die) (Liao 1939: 24, 26), *qizui dang siwang* 其罪當死亡 (such crimes deserve the death penalty) (Liao 1939: 105), *lusi* 戮死 (slaughtered and executed) (Liao 1939: 126).

in the *Zhuangzi* either directly or indirectly discussing the meaning of death. Although this may seem minimal, the *Zhuangzi* uses “transform” to not only describe the onset of death but also its meaning. In other words, the term “transform” is indispensable to the *Zhuangzi*’s understanding of death.

The first thing one notices when observing the transformation related to life and death is that this transformation is an extension of the first type of transformation mentioned above. In other words, the only salient difference between this type of transformation and when people transform into something non-human is that this transformation begins with death. The classic example is found in *Waiwu* 外物 (Affected from Outside) of the Outer Chapters: “So Wu Yun was cast into the Yangtze and Chang Hung died in Shu, where the people preserved his blood for three years, by which time it had become green jade” (p. 236). But the author’s understanding of the meaning of death is not fully articulated in this example.

To discuss the “transformation” associated with life and death, the most obvious choices are the discussions of “the transformation of things” in *Tiandao* and *Keyi*. In both cases, the term “the transformation of things” appears in the sentence “death is the transformation of things (*qi si ye wuhua* 其死也物化)” (pp. 107–108) and is contrasted with the preceding statement, “life is [in accordance with] the direction that heavenly spontaneity would go for (*qi sheng ye tianxing* 其生也天行)”, clarifying its link to death. However, no explication follows the statement “death is the transformation of things,” leaving us with minimal resources to understand the reality it intends to describe. *Dazongshi*’s story beginning with “Yan Hui asked Confucius” (hereafter “Mengsun Cai”) may help. Though it does not use the exact term “the transformation of things,” the phrase “we are all in a process of change” (p. 56) describes the same process. If we analyze the passage carefully, we can see that the author uses “the transformation of things” to discuss the meaning of life and death.

*Dazongshi*’s “Mengsun Cai” describes how, after the death of his mother, Mengsun Cai “cried without tears, there was no distress in his heart. When he mourned, there was no sorrow” (p. 56). In response, Yan Hui asked why he was renowned for his “excellence as a mourner” (p. 56). Using Confucius as a mouthpiece, the author explains why. First praising Mengsun Cai for his simplicity in funeral arrangements, Confucius then explains Mengsun Cai’s understanding of death itself (more specifically, his understanding without trying to understand):

Mengsun Cai does not know how he came to born, nor how he will die. He just knows enough not to want one or the other. He doesn’t know why he should continue, he just follows what happens without understanding! As we are all in a process of change, how can we know what unknown thing we will be changed into? As what we are changing into has not yet happened, how can we understand what change is? (p. 56).

This passage stresses that everyone will experience the changes of life and death but can know neither their source nor consequences. No one knows whether the present “me” has already undergone transformation or whether transformation is right on the horizon. After all, one can only observe current physical changes. However, the author notes that even if his body changes and alarms him, such changes do not

cause damage to his mind/heart. Even when faced with his own death, “[h]is body, housing his soul, may be affected, but his emotions are not harmed” (p. 56). For this process is akin to moving to a new home. Accordingly, Mengsun Cai does not take death to be the end of existence. Rather, after passing through death, one becomes one with all things and exists forever. Thus, “life” is only one short phase of “the whole of (eternal) existence.”<sup>15</sup> So it is ridiculous to exhaust oneself during funerals to memorialize the tiny fraction that is one’s “lived” existence.

However, we must also notice that this passage has an epistemological bent. The next passage, beginning with “Yan Hui asked Confucius” (hereafter “Yan Hui”), uses an example to question whether or not one is awake: “You dream you are a bird and rise into the Heavens. You dream you are a fish and swim down deep into the lake” (hereafter “fish and bird dream”) (p. 56). Dreaming that one has transformed into another organism is reminiscent of *Qiwulun*’s account of Zhuangzi’s “butterfly dream.”<sup>16</sup> Given that Zhuangzi’s transformation into a butterfly was labeled “the transformation of things,” it seems logical to make a similar judgment when dreaming of being a bird or fish. Yet this dream does not draw this inference. Instead, the author concludes with the need to “go with the flow and you will find yourself at one with the vastness of the void of Heaven” (p. 56). This means that everyone can accept the changes they must experience and embrace (each individual’s final) “transformation” (i.e., death).<sup>17</sup> *Qiu shui* 秋水 (Season of Autumn Floods) says, “The life force is a headlong gallop, speeding along, changing with every movement and altering every minute. As to what you should and should not do? Just go with this process of change” (p. 142). In other words, those who go through life at a “headlong gallop, speeding along” are merely experiencing “this [brief] process of change” (p. 142). Compared with this necessity, the decision whether or not to do something is miniscule indeed. Thus, “Yan Hui” exhorts the reader to embrace the changes of life. Like *Tiandao* and *Keyi* declare, “the transformation of things” means entering the next phase of existence, in this case, what we ordinarily call “death.”

At this point, we must turn to the meaning of death discussed in *Zhile*’s “Zhuangzi’s wife died.” Like “Mengsun Cai,” this passage begins with one questioning another’s method of mourning. Only, in this case, there is neither the term “transformation” nor the discussion on “awakening.” Rather, this passage discusses

<sup>15</sup> Note that the eternality of the “transformed” person does not imply “life” without end. Rather, regardless of whether or not the person is “living,” that person is always a part of the cosmos (i.e., part of the “whole [yi 一]”).

<sup>16</sup> *Zhile* says, “Death and birth are like the morning and the night” (p. 193).

<sup>17</sup> The whole passage reads: “Perhaps you and I are in dream from which we are yet to awake! In Mengsun Cai’s case the body changes but this does not affect his heart. His body, housing his soul, may be affect, but his emotions are not harmed. Mengsun Cai alone has awoken. People cry, so he cries. He considers everything as his own being. How could he know that others call something their own particular self? You dream you are a bird and rise into the Heaven. You dream you are a fish and swim down deep into the lake. We cannot tell now if the speaker is awake or asleep. Contentment produces the smile; a genuine smile cannot be forced. Don’t struggle, go with the flow and you will find yourself at one with the vastness of the void of Heaven” (p. 56).



the topic of life and death from the perspective of “change” and “vital breath (*qi* 氣).”

Let us examine the story more closely. Just as Yan Hui questioned Mengsun Cai’s method of mourning, so Hui Shi 惠施 criticizes Zhuangzi for mourning his wife’s death by “bashing a battered tub and singing” (p. 150). Interestingly, Zhuangzi initially agrees with the common understanding of life and death, saying he initially mourned too.<sup>18</sup> But, after further reflection, he realized:

However, I then thought back to her birth and to the very roots of her being, before she was born. Indeed, not just before she was born but before the time when her body was created. Not just before her body was created but before the very origin of her life’s breath. Out of all this, through the wonderful mystery of change she was given her life’s breath. Her life’s breath wrought a transformation and she had a body. Her body wrought a transformation and she was born. Now there is yet another transformation and she is dead. She is like the four seasons in the way that spring, summer, autumn and winter follow each other. She is now at peace, lying in her chamber [...]. (p. 151)

Here, the author compares life and death to the four seasons, likening it to the various changes in life’s breath enacted originally by “the wonderful mystery of change” (p. 151). Thus, the labeling of “life and death” together with the ordinary attitude toward it may be improper. Regarding the relation between breath and the four seasons, *Gengsangchu* 庚桑楚 writes, “When the life-giving breath of spring emerges, the plants begin to come to life, and then in autumn they produce their multitudes of fruits” (p. 199). Regarding the relationship between the body and vital breath, *Zhibeiyou* famously says:

Human life begins with the original breath.  
When it comes together there is life.  
When it is dispersed, there is death. (p. 188).

The same passage records, “As death and life are together in all this, which should be termed bad? All the forms of life are one” (p. 188). It states that all things are formed by breath. And life and death are merely the accumulation and dissipation of breath. Aside from this, *Zhibeiyou* uses the term “transformation” to explain the central features of life and death:

But the diseased and rotting can become the spiritual and wonderful, and the spiritual and wonderful can become the diseased and rotting. It is said, “All that is under Heaven is one breath.” (p. 188)

Interpreting this through the lens of the theory of “the transformation of things,” this statement has four features. First, “the transformation of things” results in “life” and “death.” Second, “life” is linked to the process by which “the diseased and rotting can become the spiritual and wonderful” while “death” is linked to the process by which “the spiritual and wonderful can become the diseased and rotting.” Third, life

<sup>18</sup> *Qiwulun* poses the question “When someone is born in this body, doesn’t life continue until death?” Part of the response is “[w]hen the body rots (*hua* 化), so does the mind,” implying death. The reactions associated with this description include “isn’t it tragic,” “isn’t he a pathetic sight,” and “is this not grievous.” This indicates *Qiwulun*’s author basically agrees that death is tragic and grievous.



(i.e., the spiritual and wonderful) and death (i.e., the diseased and rotting) form an endless cycle, hence the use of the term “return (*fu* 復).” Fourth, the cycle between life (i.e., the spiritual and wonderful) and death (i.e., the diseased and rotting) is a result of the accumulation and dissipation of breath.

Now we must consider the relationship between the ideas that life and death are the accumulation and dissipation of breath and “the transformation of things.” Elsewhere in *Zhibeiyou*, we find that life and death are transformations in the descriptions “life is transformation” and “death is also transformation” (p. 192). *Zhibeiyou* also writes, “Human life between Heaven and Earth is like a white colt glimpsed through a crack in the wall, quickly past. It pours forth, it overwhelms, yet there is nothing that does not return. Life is transformation, death is also transformation” (p. 192). Like Zhuangzi before he reflected in *Zhile*, the typical reaction towards this process of life and death is “[a]ll living creatures are saddened, all humanity mourns” (p. 192). However, as the conclusion of *Zhibeiyou* indicates, people cannot but acquiesce to their body following the great Returning (p. 192). This perspective is already seen earlier in the passage: “There are peoples in the middle of this kingdom, balanced between *yin* and *yang*, dwelling between Heaven and Earth. For a while he is a man and then he returns to origin. Viewed from the perspective of the origin, when life begins for him, he is just a collection of breath. When he dies, whether he is young or very old, these different destinies make little difference, his life-span is so short” (p. 192, with modification). A person’s life is as fleeting as breath. Thus, the distinction between long and short life is relatively meaningless.

*Zhile* also reads, “Life exists through scrounging; if life comes through scrounging, then life is like a dump” (p. 151). However, the last passage in *Zhile* may indicate the author sees elements of the life cycle in the dump and in breath. The author of *Zhile* uses Liezi to say the following:

Where does everything come from? From the water come creeping plants, [...] Crow’s Feet become maggots, and the leaves become butterflies. The butterflies change and become insects to be found below the stove, which are similar to snakes and are called. [...] leopards give birth to horses, horses give birth to humans, humans eventually sink back to what was in the beginning. All the multitudes of life arise from the mystery of beginning and return there. (pp. 153–154)

In this passage, “the mystery of beginning (*ji* 機)” encompasses the processes of “becoming,” “changing,” and “birthing.” This then links together all things. Most significantly, this means that human life is linked to this everlasting cycle.

In summary, when discussing life and death through the lens of “the transformation of things,” the *Zhuangzi* seems to believe that the interplay of *yin* and *yang* causes the accumulation and dissipation of breath which, in turn, creates the life of all organisms. Put differently, life is merely a miniscule phase in the cycle of regeneration jumpstarted by “the mystery of beginning.” Only this “transformation of things” found in *Tiandao* and *Keyi* centers primarily on death. According to *Zhibeiyou*, the cycle of life and death is formed by breath. Here, the “transformation of things” primarily refers to the process by which “the spiritual and wonderful can become the diseased and rotting.” By comparison, according to *Zhile*, the life and

death of all things are merely one part which “arise[s] from the mystery of beginning.”

## 4 The Transformation of Perception

The “transformation” discussed above primarily centered on examples of changes in physical bodies. But the authors of the *Zhuangzi* also know that the changes experienced in a lifetime are not limited merely to the body. They extend also to the “mind/heart” or sphere of perception. This explains why in *Zhile*’s “Zhuangzi’s wife died,” the term “observation/insight (*cha* 察)” is used to express the change in Zhuangzi’s perspective on life and death. The example discussed below also discusses change in perception but expressed through the term “transformation.”

The term “transformation” describes the transformation of perception in three passages in the *Zhuangzi*, one in *Zeyang*, two in *Yuyan* 寓言 (Analogies). This section will focus, first, on the passage from *Zeyang*, then the two from *Yuyan*. The *Zeyang* passage describes the eminent Qu Boyu 蘧伯玉 from *weiguo* 衛國 (the state of Wey<sup>19</sup>) during the Spring and Autumn Period:

Qu Boyu had lived for sixty years and he changed at sixty. He had never questioned that he was right, but he came to change his views and saw that from the beginning he had been wrong. Now it was not possible to know whether what he had been saying for fifty-nine years was right or wrong. (p. 230)

The second example comes from *Zeyang* in a dialogue between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi (hereafter “Confucius turned sixty”). Here, Zhuangzi is the speaker and describes Confucius’ change in perception:

Zhuang Zi asked Hui Zi, “In reaching the age of sixty, Confucius has changed his views [...], so what he once held to be right he now holds to be wrong. So who knows now whether what he once called right he hasn’t fifty-nine times called wrong?” (p. 245).

The two underlined sections above translate the same phrase *xingnian liushi er liushi hua* 行年六十而六十化 (hereafter “lived till sixty and then changed his views”). This implies that Zhuangzi’s initial successors assumed that the early thoughts of eminent thinkers were not necessarily correct. However, this does not imply that this perspective necessarily originated with Zhuangzi or the early Daoists from the Early to Middle Warring States Period. For example, the commentary on the *ge* 革 hexagram from the *Book of Changes* also intimates that people’s thoughts change: *daren hubian* 大人虎變 (the great man changes like a tiger changes its stripes) and *junzi baobian* 君子豹變 (the superior man changes like a leopard changes its spots). The Confucian school of the Warring States Period interprets this as grounds for enjoining the superior man not to dodge the responsibility of admitting past mistakes. In contrast, *Zeyang* and *Yuyan* take this to mean human thought

<sup>19</sup>Used to distinguish from the larger state of *wei* (i.e., 魏國).

and judgments are unreliable. However, our focus is not the difference between Confucian and Daoist understandings of *gaiguo* 改過 (changing the past or correcting one's previous ways), but rather the lens of "transformation" which the authors of *Zeyang* and *Yuyan* use to interpret one's psychological decision to correct previous past mistakes. Before explicating this point further, it may help to briefly discuss the third example of "the transformation of perception."

Also appearing in *Yuyan*, this third example follows the story of "Confucius turned sixty." It describes Confucius' capable student Zeng Shen 曾參:

Master Zeng (i.e., Zeng Shen) twice held power but twice he changed his heart, saying, "At first, when I was caring for my parents, my salary was three *fu* of rice, but I was happy. The second time I received three thousand *chung* of rice, but my parents were gone and I was sad." (p. 246)

The change experienced by *Yuyan*'s Master Zeng is rather different from *Zeyang*'s Qu Boyu and *Yuyan*'s Confucius. The latter two each "lived till sixty and then changed his views." This description is accompanied by corresponding value judgments. In contrast, Master Zeng's perceptual change is not accompanied by such value judgments. Instead, the passage only compares two states: "initially happy" and "subsequently sad." Evidently, this passage does not intend to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of Master Zeng's emotions. Its inclusion must have other purposes.

Taking this into account, we can nonetheless seek commonalities between the three stories. Although the three passages take different tacks, each focuses on an eminent person—Qu Boyu, Confucius, Master Zeng—and describes his change in perception as "transformation." This is highlighted by comparing *Zeyang*'s description of Qu Boyu to that of *Huainanzi*'s *Yuandaoxun* 原道訓 (Teaching on the Original Way) chapter. In *Huainanzi*, Qu Boyu also realizes his past mistakes, described as follows: "People live till seventy and their actions consist of daily worries and monthly regrets all the way till death. Qu Boyu was fifty years old and had forty-nine mistakes." Notice the term "transformation" is not used. The *Huainanzi* focuses on whether Qu Boyu repented of past mistakes not in his change of perception. In other words, *Huainanzi* does not interpret this reality through the lens of "the transformation of things." In contrast, though containing different narrative details, both Confucius' and Master Zeng's change of heart are described as "transformations." That the passages are ordered consecutively indicates the author intentionally described these changes in perception as "transformation."

Related to this, the "transformation of perception" also appears in another passage. *Yufu* 漁夫 (The Fisherman) records the dialogue between Confucius and a fisherman. "Confucius wandered through the Black Curtain Forest" (p. 280) and saw a fisherman. Confucius immediately recognized the fisherman as a sage, and deferentially went to inquire of him. Surprised by his humility, Zilu 子路 asked, "Wasn't this going a bit too far?" (p. 285). In response, Confucius reproaches Zilu, "Oh, Yu, it's very hard to change (i.e., *hua* 化) you!" (p. 285). Here, the change refers to the difficulty in changing Zilu's perception.

The same meaning can be seen in *Gengsangchu*. Gengsang Chu 庚桑楚 confesses he is unable to continue teaching Nanrong Chu 南榮趺 and so exhorts him to visit and learn from Laozi:

That’s all I can say. There is a saying, mud daubers are incapable of changing into caterpillars. The fowl of Yue cannot hatch goose eggs, but those of Lu can. It is not that the virtue of one kind of hen is better than that of another. That one can and the other cannot is to do with their size, big and small. My talents are limited and cannot effect a change in you[...] why don’t you go south and see Laozi? (hereafter “mud daubers”) (p. 201)

That Gengsang Chu is unable to change Nanrong Chu is likely due to the latter’s limited understanding. This is clear from the following dialogue between Nanrong Chu and Laozi, centered on dispelling the former’s perplexities. However, there is another point worth highlighting. Nanrong Chu’s inability to change his perception is compared with the inability of mud daubers to change into caterpillars. This point will be explicated more fully below.

What, then, is the ideal state of perception? The *Zhuangzi* does not explicitly mention “transformation” in answering this question. But his answer is clear in the *Yingdiwang* 應帝王 (Response to Supreme Rulers) chapter and the *Tiandao* chapter: the state in which one is unable to distinguish between ox and horse. For example, *Yingdiwang* writes, “Noble ruler Tai slept the sleep of innocence and awoke in calm collectedness. Sometimes he believed himself to be a horse, other times he might believe he was an ox. His wisdom was utterly true, his Virtue was profoundly real. He never came into awareness of no-man” (p. 60). Before transcending the distinction between ox and horse, one must “awaken,” meaning this sort of understanding is cognitively-based. Similarly, using Laozi as a mouthpiece, *Tiandao* writes, “I think I have freed myself from knowledge, from the spiritual and from being a sage. If you had called me an ox yesterday, Sir, then I would have said I was an ox. If you had called me a horse, I would have said I was a horse” (p. 113). This is Laozi’s explanation for why Shi Chengqi 士成綺 misunderstood him, also clearly a cognitively-based problem.<sup>20</sup> If we understand not distinguishing between ox and horse as the wisdom of knowing “all things are equal,” it means everyone must deepen one’s observation (*cha* 察) to transform one’s perception.

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<sup>20</sup> *Qiushui* also mentions not distinguishing between ox and horse: “The season of the autumn floods had come and the hundred rivers were pouring into the Yellow river. The waters were churning and so wide that, looking across from one bank to other, it was impossible to distinguish an ox from a horse. At this the Lord of the Yellow River was decidedly pleased, thinking that the most beautiful thing in the whole world belonged to him” (p. 137) But the satisfaction the Lord of the Yellow River derived from making it “impossible to distinguish an ox from a horse” is overcome by the North Ocean making it such that one “could see no end to the waters” (p. 137).

## 5 The Transformation of All Things Imaginable

The three “transformations” discussed so far are all transformations of the subject, whether it be the body or the mind/heart. This section discusses the transformation of all things imaginable, including both those imagined and real. The first type (i.e., the transformation of all things imagined) uses metaphorical transformations to promote an ideal. The second type (i.e., the transformation of all things real) uses the lens of “transformation” to link initially distinct things. This “transformation” forms a worldview. On the one hand, it grounds the idea that “all things are equal.” On the other hand, Zhuangzi’s thought wanders freely, described in a variety of ways: “haphazard and nonsensical arguments” (*zhiyan* 卮言), “comically fluent [talk]” (*huaqi* 滑稽),<sup>21</sup> and “[h]e came and went with the spirit of Heaven and Earth but he never viewed all the forms of life as being beneath him” (p. 304).

Now, let us analyze examples of “transformation” in which metaphors are used to convey a different perspective. The most direct example of this sort of metaphorical “transformation” is found in *Dasheng* 達生 (Mastering Life):

Workman Chui could draw as straight as a T-square or as a compass, because his fingers could follow the changes and his heart did not obstruct. Thus his mind was one and never blocked. The feet can be forgotten when you walk in comfortable shoes. The waist can be forgotten when your belt fits comfortably. Knowledge can forget yes and no, if the heart journeys contentedly. Nothing changes inside, nothing proceeds from outside, if you respond to what occurs in a contented way. By starting with what is contented, not undergoing that which is disturbing, it is possible to know the contentment of forgetting what contentment is. (p. 163)

In this passage (hereafter “Workman Chui”), workman Chui’s fingers and drawing instruments are “transformed into one whole” (*huawei yiti* 化為一體). But his fingers do not actually become drawing instruments. Rather, the author uses the term “transform” to stress that workman Chui can draw perfect lines or curves even without the corresponding instruments. Again, the author does not believe that fingers will really become drawing instruments. For this reason, being “transformed into one whole” is a metaphor whose purpose is to highlight this reality: when one is not aware of an object, one’s use of said object (e.g., to draw) becomes infinitely more effective.

By way of comparison, *Dazongshi* records the response of Master Yu to Master Si when asked about his deformities:

“Do you dislike it?” asked Master Si. “Not really, why should I? For example, perhaps my left arm will become a cockerel and then I shall be able to tell the time at night. Maybe, eventually, my right arm will become a crossbow and then I can hunt a bird and eat it. Possibly my bottom will become wheels and my soul will be a horse which I shall climb upon and go for a ride. After all, I wouldn’t then need any other vehicle again!” (p. 53)

<sup>21</sup> The term *huaqi* 滑稽 is used to characterize Zhuangzi’s arguments in the “Biographies of Mengzi and Xun Qing” of the *Shiji*.

Here, Master Yu expresses his belief that his deformities are enacted by the Maker of All and entirely unrelated to his own will. Intriguingly, although Master Yu’s deformities usually elicit dislike (hence Master Si’s question, “Do you dislike it?”), Master Yu instead imagines his body parts transforming into a cockerel, crossbow, wheels, etc. Moreover, if successfully transformed, he even lists the positive uses of these “deformities”: “I shall be able to tell the time at night,” “I can hunt a bird and eat it,” “I shall climb upon and go for a ride.” Returning to the former example, when *Dasheng*’s workman Chui’s “mind was one and never blocked,” his fingers were able to produce changes as remarkable as those produced by the Maker of All in Master Yu’s body. Of course, we cannot rely on this observation alone to argue that the theories of “transformation” in *Dazongshi* and *Dasheng* are derived from a common source. But we can still note that *Dasheng* sees “transformation” as the method for attaining the highest goal (in this case, drawing the straightest line or perfect curve). If “transformation” is a method, this transformation should only occur when the subject (e.g., the Maker of All) controls its object.

Next, let us discuss the characteristics of the second type of the transformation of all things imaginable (i.e., the transformation of all things real). These transformations occur when initially distinct subjects are reconstituted. More concretely, the passages below use the terms “transformation” and “the transformation of things” to link the real world with the imaginary. This type of transformation appears especially memorably in the well-known opening to *Xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊 (Wandering Where You Will)—“In the darkness of the north there is a fish, whose name is Kun 鯀”—and the conclusion to *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream.” On full display in these passages is the *Zhuangzi*’s characteristically untrammelled philosophy, described elsewhere as “haphazard and nonsensical arguments”, “comically fluent [talk],” and “[h]e came and went with the spirit of Heaven and Earth” (p. 304).

To analyze more carefully how the term “transformation” links distinct things, let us first observe the use of “transformation” in *Xiaoyaoyou*’s opening story. This passage is the first story in the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. So this passage, like *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream,” has historically been lauded as representative of *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy. However, the function of the term “transformation” in this passage has not received enough attention. As many know, the latter half of this passage explicates its theme: “The understanding of the small cannot be compared to the understanding of the great. A few years cannot be compared to many years” (p. 2). Roughly four hundred words separate the opening line, “In the darkness of the north there is a fish, whose name is Kun” and its conclusion, “something envied by many people, which is rather pathetic” (p. 2). Here, we only cite its opening, which contains the term “transformation”:

In the darkness of the north there is a fish, whose name is Kun. This fish is enormous, I don’t know how many thousand miles long. It also changes into a bird, whose name is Peng, and Peng’s back is I don’t know how many thousand miles across. When it rises in the air, its wings are like the clouds of Heaven. When the seas move, the bird too travels to the south darkness, the darkness known as the Pool of Heaven. (hereafter “Kun Becomes Peng”) (P.1)

Interestingly, immediately following the conclusion of the passage above (i.e., “[...] something envied by many people, which is rather pathetic!”) is another passage recording the same story, in a slightly different manner:

When the Emperor Tang debated with Chi, a similar issue arose, for he said: ‘In the barren north there is a dark sea called Heaven’s Pool. Here there is a fish, several thousand miles wide and goodness knows how long. This creature is called Kun. There is also a bird, whose name is Peng, and whose back is like Mount Tai and whose wings cover the heavens. He rises up on a whirlwind, ninety thousand miles high, soaring through the clouds and breaking through the clear blue sky, then turns to plot his course south, travelling to the south darkness. (hereafter “Peng and Kun”) (p. 2–3)

Notice the similarity of structure. Each story first introduces Kun and Peng. This is followed by laughter and derision either from a cicada and dove or a quail. Although the creatures giving their opinion differ, compared to either Kun or Peng, they clearly illustrate “[t]he understanding of the small cannot be compared to the understanding of the great” (p. 2) and explain “what distinguishes the small from the great” (p. 3).

At this point, it is worth noting that, following the two accounts cited above, we find a third description: “when Peng flies to the southern darkness, the waters are stirred up for three thousand miles, and he rises up in a whirlwind, soaring ninety thousand miles, not ceasing for six months” (hereafter “Peng Flies”) (p. 1). Evidently, this is also a permutation of the opening story about the bird Peng. In the mere five hundred characters from the opening line of *Xiaoyaoyou* (i.e., “In the darkness of the north there is a fish, whose name is Kun”) to the explanation “[t]his is what distinguishes the small from the great,” there are three descriptions of Peng’s flight southward. Indeed, Peng is the common “main character” of these three passages, hereafter entitled, in order, “Kun Becomes Peng,” “Peng and Kun,” and “Peng Flies.”

However, upon more careful analysis, the content of these three descriptions differs dramatically. First, let us focus on “Peng Flies,” which references the *Book of Wonders*. Although we are unable to ascertain any concrete textual situation of the *Book of Wonders*, according to the author of *Xiaoyaoyou*, it “records a variety of marvels.” It may very well be the origin of the story of Peng. The *Book of Wonders* describes Peng primarily as (1) a large bird and (2) flying 90,000 miles. These descriptions are shared by the two other passages. This implies that the story of the fish named Kun originated from the story “a large bird named Peng flew 90,000 miles.” However, the large fish Kun does not appear in the *Book of Wonders*. By contrast, both Kun and Peng appear in the “Kun Becomes Peng” and “Peng and Kun” editions. While these two editions both provide detailed descriptions of Peng’s flight, their descriptions of Kun are limited to its immense size. This seems to support our conclusion above regarding the relation between Kun and Peng. Likely, the initial story only contained Peng. But the “Kun Becomes Peng” and “Peng and Kun” editions later added the descriptions of the large Kun, in order to illustrate “[t]he understanding of the small cannot be compared to the understanding of the great” and explain “what distinguishes the small from the great.”



However, there is also a significant difference between the “Kun Becomes Peng” and “Peng and Kun” versions. Namely, “Peng and Kun” describes Kun and Peng as different creatures, whereas “Kun Becomes Peng” describes them as the same. According to “Kun Becomes Peng”: “Kun [...] is enormous, I don’t know how many thousand miles long. It also changes into a bird, whose name is Peng.” If the authors of “Kun Becomes Peng” and “Peng and Kun” only wanted to illustrate “[t]he understanding of the small cannot be compared to the understanding of the great,” they need not combine the two into one creature. So why does *Xiaoyaoyou* combine the two via “transformation”? Before providing an answer, let us first analyze some examples of fish and birds in *Dazongshi*.

The discussion of fish and birds appears in *Dazongshi*’s “Mengsun Cai.” As mentioned above, Confucius praises Mengsun Cai’s method of mourning because he understood that “[a]s we are all in a process of change, how can we know what unknown thing we will change into?” (p. 56). Mengsun Cai “alone has awoken” contrasts with Confucius and Yan Hui being trapped “in a dream from which we are yet to awaken” (p. 56). Confucius thought that people could “dream you are a bird and rise into the Heavens [...] and dream you are a fish and swim down deep into the lake.” This experience does not occur in the real world but in the dream world. Thus this description links up with the descriptions of the imaginary Peng and Kun.

However, as noted above, of the three Peng passages above, only “Kun Becomes Peng” can be directly linked to *Dazongshi*’s descriptions bird and fish. Both are predicated upon the theory of “transformation.” Let us examine this in more detail. First, “Peng Flies” describes Peng, but, unlike the *Dazongshi*, lacks any mention of Kun. What of “Peng and Kun?” Both Peng and Kun appear in the story. However, Peng and Kun are distinct characters and are invoked to highlight “what distinguishes the small from the great” by emphasizing their enormous size. Seen from this perspective, the Peng and Kun in “Peng and Kun” are clearly not centered on the theory of “transformation.” In contrast, “Kun Becomes Peng” records that Kun “changes into a bird Peng,” indicating the two are really one subject.

Having analyzed these differences, let us reexamine the meaning of *Dazongshi*’s “fish and bird dream.” Undoubtedly, this passage describes the possible dream state of the interlocutor Yan Hui. In his dreams, Yan Hui can transform into either bird or fish. Though initially distinct creatures, the bird and fish become one creature through the dreamer Yan Hui. Similarly, “Kun Becomes Peng” uses the term “transform” as the medium uniting Peng and Kun. If we imagine that the content of “Kun Becomes Peng” came from its author’s (potential) dream, *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng” and *Dazongshi*’s “fish and bird dream” parallel one another, as displayed in the following manner:

***Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng”**

Subject (author)→dream→Kun=(changes into) Peng

Subject=Kun=Peng

***Dazongshi's "fish and bird dream"***

Subject (Yan Hui)→dream→fish

Subject (Yan Hui)→dream→bird

Subject=fish=bird

Above, we see that the fish is identified with the bird, just as Kun is identified with Peng. However, though the fish and bird are united via the dreamer Yan Hui, does this imply that he can be united with the fish and bird each time he dreams? Furthermore, is "dreaming as a fish" and "dreaming as a bird" equivalent to "transformed into a fish" and "transformed into a bird?" Indeed, "dreaming as a fish" or "dreaming as a bird" illustrate the preceding claim "we are all in a process of change" and the claim which follows, "find yourself at one with the vastness of the void of Heaven." Additionally, *Qiwulun's* "butterfly dream" illustrates the transformation into other creatures within a dream:

Once upon a time, Zhuang Zhou dreamt that he was a butterfly, flitting around and enjoying itself. I had no idea it was Zhou. Then suddenly I woke up and was Zhou again. But I could not tell, had I been Zhou dreaming I was butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming it was Zhou? However, there must be some sort of difference between Zhou and a butterfly! We call this the transformation of things. (P. 20, with modification)

For now, let us refrain from explaining the role played by "the transformation of things." Instead, let us first focus on how dreaming is called "the transformation of things." Unlike *Tiandao* and *Keyi's* discussion of "death is the transformation of things," this passage does not mention death. Rather, it presents dreaming as medium for transformation between Zhuangzi and the butterfly. If we interpret Zhuangzi's relationship with the butterfly from the perspective of *Dazongshi's* "fish and bird dream," Zhuangzi can not only transform into a butterfly within a dream, the butterfly can also transform into Zhuangzi in its own dream. In this way, the "dreamer" and the "dreamed of" form a unity. What does this mean for our understanding of *Dazongshi's* "fish and bird dream?" It means that, like in the "butterfly dream," Yan Hui forms one unity with the fish and bird, linked via "the transformation of things." Similarly, Kun and Peng in "Kun Becomes Peng" are linked via "transformation." The relationships in these three passages established via "the transformation of things" can be organized as follows:

***Xiaoyaoyou's "Kun Becomes Peng"***

Subject (author)←the transformation of things→Kun←transformation→Peng

Subject=Kun=Peng

***Dazongshi's "fish and bird dream"***

Subject (Yan Hui)←the transformation of things→fish

Subject (Yan Hui)←the transformation of things→bird

Subject=fish=bird

***Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream”**

Subject (Zhuangzi) ← the transformation of things → butterfly

Subject = butterfly

If we interpret *Dazongshi*’s “fish and bird dream” through the lens of *Qiwulun*’s “the transformation of things,” Yan Hui can “transform” into either fish or bird; conversely, fish or bird can also “transform” into Yan Hui. Similarly applied to *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng,” the author can “transform” into Kun (=Peng) or Peng (=Kun); Kun or Peng can also “transform” into the author of the passage. Seen this way, all three passages agree that a person (at least in theory) can become anything imaginable via a dream-like “transformation of things.”

As such, different from the previous three, this fourth mode of “transformation” only exists in human consciousness. Although *Tiandao*, *Keyi*, and *Qiwulun* all use the term “the transformation of things,” they have distinct meanings. *Tiandao* and *Keyi*’s uses “death is the transformation of things” to explain the changes experienced by organisms. Conversely, “the transformation of things” in *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream” is used primarily to link all things imaginable. In summary, as expressed in *Qiwulun*’s “the transformation of all things,” originally distinct things can overcome the limits of time and space and unite freely and without limit. This then lays the groundwork for the *Zhuangzi*’s claim that “all things are equal.”

## 6 The Two Functions of the *Zhuangzi*’s Concept of “Transformation”

The preceding analysis unpacked the four meanings of the *Zhuangzi*’s conception of “transformation.” Aside from these four meanings, the *Zhuangzi*’s concept of “transformation” also has two important functions: (1) the change or development of subjects and arguments from individual paragraph level to comprehensive whole chapter level, and (2) the synthesis of initially distinct subjects into more integrated ones. Through these two functions of “transformation,” the *Zhuangzi* reveals its “multilevel” analysis.

Let us focus first on the “subject changing” function of “transformation.” In the third and fourth meanings of “transformation,” we cited some examples of how subjects transformed. In connection with the third meaning, we cited *Zeyang* and *Yuyan*’s transformation of perception (e.g., “lived till sixty and then changed his views”). As noted above, unlike in *Huainanzi*, this transformation of perception is used throughout the *Zhuangzi*. Moreover, as *Gengsangchu*’s “mud daubers” story illustrates, Nanrong Chu is initially unable to understand, just like “mud daubers are incapable of changing into caterpillars.” Here, the changes in caterpillar bodies are used to combine “growth in understanding” and “changes in body.”

The fourth meaning of transformation is highlighted in *Xiaoyaoyou*. As mentioned above, there are three passages describing Peng: “Kun Becomes Peng,” “Peng and Kun,” and “Peng Flies.” The *Book of Wonders* appears to record the earliest account, one without Kun. By comparison, “Kun Becomes Peng” and “Peng Flies” both describe Kun to illustrate “[t]he understanding of the small cannot be compared to the understanding of the great” and explain “what distinguishes the small from the great.” However, “Kun Becomes Peng” does not stop here. While the Peng and Kun in “Peng Flies” are distinct creatures, in “Kun Becomes Peng” they are united. We have already noted that “Kun Becomes Peng” links Peng and Kun with the term “transformation.” But it should be noted that in addition to “[t]he understanding of the small cannot be compared to the understanding of the great,” “Kun Becomes Peng” adds “[a] few years cannot be compared to many years” (p. 2). This is, in effect, “what distinguishes the small from the great” as seen through the lens of “the transformation in things.” In other words, as seen earlier in the *Zeyang’s* and *Yuyan’s* descriptions that “[he] lived till sixty and then changed his views,” the transformation of perception is part of the transformation of the body. Similarly, “Kun Becomes Peng” presents distinguishing between small and great understanding as parallel to living for a few or many years.

Below, we will examine how the term “transformation” integrates the entirety of the *Zhuangzi*. The importance of the concept of “transformation” to the *Zhuangzi’s* philosophy is not limited to it merely being fruitful and foundational, but also includes being the medium connecting the disparate passages of the *Zhuangzi* like a backbone. Below, we will highlight this function by comparing the theory of “transformation” from *Xiaoyaoyou* and *Qiwulun* with the main points of *Tianxia* 天下 (All Under Heaven). We will find that the *Zhuangzi’s* characteristic feature that “all things are equal” is instantiated by this organizing feature of the theory of “transformation.” *Tianxia* concludes our current edition of the *Zhuangzi*. Although “the transformation of things” never appears in it, its numerous uses of “transformation” may represent the *Zhuangzi’s* theory of “transformation” at the time the text was completed.

It is well-known that *Tianxia* evaluates the philosophy of everyone from the “scholars of Zou and Lu” and “cultural elites” to Zhuangzi and Hui Shi. The term “transformation” is used three times in *Tianxia’s* evaluation. The first use appears in the chapter’s introduction. The latter two uses occur when evaluating Zhuangzi’s philosophy. For convenience, let us first analyze the two uses related to the evaluation of Zhuangzi’s philosophy. Here, the author explains Zhuangzi’s worldview: through *Daoshu* 道術 (the method for [mastering] the Way) to arrive at *yingyuhua* 應於化 (embracing the changes). In other words, according to *Tianxia*, the world Zhuangzi knows is best described as “[t]he blank and the motionless have no form; change and transformation are never at rest” and the best way to understand this world is to emulate people of the past characterized as “still continues to explore with us the changes and transformations that arise within all, and come from him.” Moreover, *Tianxia* explains Zhuangzi’s method for mastering the Way and concludes by exclaiming, “His teachings have never been fully appreciated, as they are difficult and subtle”. Put simply, *Tianxia* essentially argues that Zhuangzi’s

greatness was because “he still continues to explore with us the changes and transformations that arise within all, and come from him” (pp. 303–304).

Next, let us analyze the use of “transformation” in *Tianxia*’s introduction. *Tianxia* divides people into seven categories: Heavenly men, miraculous men, perfect men, sages, noblemen, government officials, and people. But the general population usually does not become a Heavenly man “not cut off from his primal origin,” spiritual man “not cut off from the true nature,” or perfect man “not cut off from the truth” (p. 296). On the opposite extreme is the rejected Confucian ideal: “[t]he one who makes benevolence the model for kindness” (p. 296). Thus, between these “supermen” and the “Confucian ideal” is another category of people. These “sages,” like ordinary people, habitually “view x as y,” but still partly approach the level of the former three categories (i.e., “primal origin,” “true nature” and “the truth”). What then characterizes these “sages” who use Heaven, Virtue, and *Dao* as their means to achieve their respective ideals? The answer given is the sage “sees change and transformation as natural” (p. 296). At this point, we can understand the sage who “sees change and transformation as natural” to be one who approximates the author of *Tianxia*’s own ideal, to understand “[t]he blank and the motionless have no form; change and transformation are never at rest” and “still continues to explore with us the changes and transformations that arise within all, and come from him.” In other words, according to *Tianxia*, Zhuangzi lives in a world where “[t]he blank and the motionless have no form; change and transformation are never at rest” and lives in a manner that “sees change and transformation as natural.” Since the one who “sees change and transformation as natural” is a “sage,” the *Tianxia* implies that Zhuangzi’s “the method for [mastering] the Way” is the path towards becoming a sage. In sum, according to *Tianxia*, the term “transformation” is central to understanding Zhuangzi’s “the method for [mastering] the Way.”

Based on these observations, perhaps we can begin examining how the theory of “the transformation (of things)” runs throughout both *Xiaoyaoyou* and *Qiwulun*. As mentioned above, *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng,” *Dazongshi*’s “fish and bird dream,” and *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream” collectively illustrate that “transformation” links together all things imaginable, whether one species with another or dreams with reality. Let us examine in more detail the role “butterfly dream” plays in the first two chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.

As mentioned above, *Qiwulun* uses “the transformation of things” to describe both the interplay between Zhuangzi and butterfly as well as that between waking and sleeping. As the last passage in *Qiwulun*, the last line of “butterfly dream”—“[w]e call this the transformation of things”—can be considered the chapter’s conclusion. The organization of the chapter (as we have it) entitled “equality of all things” seems to aptly concluded with “the transformation of all things.” Assuming the idea of “transformation” is developed throughout *Xiaoyaoyou* and *Qiwulun*, we find *Xiaoyaoyou* beginning with the “transformation” of Kun to Peng and *Qiwulun* concluding with “[w]e call this the transformation of things.” In sum, the first two chapters of the *Zhuangzi*—*Xiaoyaoyou* and *Qiwulun*—begins with “transformation” and concludes with “the transformation of things.” Moreover, consider that the final chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (i.e., *Tianxia*) centered on appraising Zhuangzi’s

philosophy and ends with praising him for “embracing the changes.” From this, it is likely that, in *Xiaoyaoyou* and *Qiwulun*, *Tianxia*’s author derived “the transformation (of things)” from *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng” and *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream.” Although it is not argued here that *Tianxia*’s author also authored *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng” and/or *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream,” it is likely that the *Tianxia*’s author relied heavily on three stories of the *Zhuangzi*: *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng,” *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream,” and *Dazongshi*’s “fish and bird dream.”

In sum, the concept of “transformation” threads together previously disparate descriptions from *Zeyang*, *Yuyan*, *Gengsangchu*, *Xiaoyaoyou*, *Qiwulun*, etc. to stitch together the idea that in “embracing the changes” we recognize that “all things are equal” (i.e., all things become one through transformation).

## 7 The Possible Genesis of the *Zhuangzi*’s Theory of “the Transformation of Things”

Adding the phrase “[a] few years cannot be compared to many years” to *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng” discussion of “transformation” changes its emphasis from epistemology to “biological transformation.” In the same way, the *Zhuangzi*’s concept of “transformation” unites otherwise disparate subjects, elevating it into “the transformation of things.” This is likely corroborated by *Tianxia*, currently the concluding chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. However, note that this does not imply the *Zhuangzi*’s concept of “transformation” was a later addition. Put differently, “the transformation of things” was likely already promoted by the earliest passages compiled into the *Zhuangzi*. If so, the theory of “the transformation of things” was central to the *Zhuangzi* since the beginning, eventually coalescing into its “backbone.” To examine the early features of “the transformation of things,” we must first observe the multilayered structure of the arguments related to “death is the transformation of things” and examine the possibility that this theory of “the transformation of things” is closer to *Zhuangzi* than initially apparent.

First, to discuss the content and meaning of “the transformation of things” in the earliest passages, we need to examine this passage from *Tiandi* 天地 (Heaven and Earth): “There is a saying: If you know the happiness of Heaven, then you know that life is from Heaven and death is the transformation of things” (pp. 107–108). Notice that this description is preceded by a larger passage that “*Zhuangzi* said.” *Tiandi* records:

*Zhuangzi* said, “My Master Teacher! My Master Teacher! He crushes all life but doesn’t believe himself to be severe; he is generous to multitudes of generations but does not think this benevolent; he is older than oldest but he does not think himself old; he overarches Heaven and sustains Earth, shaping and creating endless bodies but he does not think himself skillful. This is what is known as Heavenly happiness.” (hereafter “learning Heavenly happiness”) (p. 107, with modification).

According to *Tiandi*, the speaker of this passage is Zhuangzi. So Zhuangzi is likely also the speaker of the passage immediately following it: “There is a saying: If you know the happiness of Heaven, then you know that life is from Heaven and death is the transformation of things.” If Zhuangzi said this, it likely represents his own philosophy.<sup>22</sup> However, it is not necessary to establish here that these two passages were truly written by Zhuangzi. Regardless of whether it represents Zhuangzi’s philosophy, this passage was likely already found in the earliest passages which eventually became the *Zhuangzi*, especially when compared with *Dazongshi*’s “Yierzi.” As the conclusion of *Dazongshi*’s “Yierzi” records:

Oh my Master, oh my Master! He crushes all life but doesn’t believe himself to be *righteous*. His blessings extend to all life, but he doesn’t see himself as blessed. Older than antiquity, yet not old. Overarching Heaven, carrying Earth and forming all things, he is no craftsman. It is through him that I wander. (p. 57, with modification)

The speaker in this passage is Xu You. Comparing the passages in *Tiandi* and *Dazongshi* beginning with “Oh my Master,” we find the difference to be one word concluding the sentence, “He crushes all life but doesn’t believe himself to be *severe/righteous*.” *Tianxia* completes the sentence with the word “*lie* 戾 (severe),” and the *Dazongshi* with “*yi* 義 (righteous or just).” From the perspective of coherence with *Tiandi*, it makes more sense to appraise “he crushes all life” as “severe,” instead of following *Dazongshi* in noting “crushing all life” is not “righteous/just.” Accordingly, we can surmise that this passage more likely initially read, “He judges all life but doesn’t believe himself to be severe.” Then did *Dazongshi*’s “righteous/just” result from a corruption of “severe”? We certainly cannot exclude the possibility. But perhaps it was not an unintentional corruption but an intentional revision. For the passage from *Dazongshi* begins with “Master Yao has already branded on you the practice of benevolence and justice (*yi* 義) and mutilated you with the distinction between right and wrong” (p. 57). This is followed by discussing how to escape the branding of practicing benevolence and justice and mutilation of distinguishing between right and wrong.<sup>23</sup> Thus the author of *Dazongshi* replaces “severe” with “righteous/just” to argue both that the Maker of All will not practice benevolence and justice. This usage also coheres with the language of “branded on you the practice of benevolence and justice.” The author picks Xu You, an ancient hermit (and imagined character in the story), as spokesman to belittle benevolence and justice. At a minimum, if we can confirm that the passage from *Tiandao* originated

<sup>22</sup> Sōkichi Tsuda (津田左右吉) thinks the *Zhuangzi*, including large sections of the Inner Chapters, represented the thought from the Later Warring States Period or even from the Qin-Han Period. Nevertheless, he did not reject the possibility that the things that “Zhuangzi said” in *Tiandi* may have come from what he considered to be “original *Zhuangzi*” (the earliest passages eventually compiled into *Zhuangzi*). (Tsuda 1939: 63)

<sup>23</sup> *Zaiyou* records, “Isn’t it strange that we can see neither sageness nor wisdom, neither benevolence nor righteousness in the yoke and shackles of punishment!” But it is not framed in the context of “the transformation (of things).”



from Zhuangzi himself and was elaborated in two separate passages, this supports the claim that Zhuangzi's ideas related to "the transformation of things" likely had an early origin.

Moreover, *Tiandao* argues that each person needs to accept the "crushing" of the Maker of All. Only with this sort of attitude can one understand both that "death is the transformation of things" and "Heavenly happiness." This emphasis on "Heavenly happiness" accords with Xunzi's opinion that "Zhuangzi was tied down to [the idea of] Heaven, and did not understand [the importance of] human [affairs]." Thus "Heavenly happiness" which understands that "death is the transformation of things" may belong to Zhuangzi's earliest theory of "transformation." And its content primarily includes the ebb and flow of all life.

## 8 Conclusion

Past studies of the *Zhuangzi's* "the transformation of things" follow a basic pattern. They begin by analyzing the one instance of "the transformation of things" in *Qiwulun's* "butterfly dream." Then they often use the results derived from this one example and immediately launch into discussions of ideas central to the entirety of the *Zhuangzi*, including "all things are equal," "viewing life and death equally," "subject-object integration," etc. Many past studies have also explicated "the transformation of things" from the perspective of epistemology. In contrast to these previous studies, this chapter has analyzed all instances of "things," "change," "the transformation of things," and "change and transformation" to elucidate the four meanings of the *Zhuangzi's* concept of "transformation." Aside from these four meanings, the *Zhuangzi's* concept of "transformation" serves two functions in the *Zhuangzi's* philosophy. The first is taking previously disparate passages and changing them into ones related to growth. The second is combining previously disparate topics with the concept "transformation." Most clearly, the concept of "transformation" strings together *Xiaoyaoyou's* "Kun Becomes Peng," *Qiwulun's* "butterfly dream," *Dazongshi's* "fish and bird dream," and *Tianxia's* praise of Zhuangzi as a practitioner who "sees change and transformation as natural." As the eulogy to Zhuangzi in *Tianxia's* was likely written at a later stage of intellectual development, the theory of "transformation" stringing together different passages likely also belongs to a later stage.

But the analysis of "the transformation of things" in *Tiandao* and *Keyi* reveals an emphasis on the physical changes to one's body. And the phrases preceding these descriptions—"Zhuangzi said," "Heavenly happiness," etc.—may indicate a close connection with Zhuangzi himself. Accepting "transformation" (=death) by first accepting the oversight of Heaven/the Maker of All differs from accepting that all things "become one" because "all things are equal." So while we cannot know

whether Zhuangzi himself advocated that “death is the transformation of things,”<sup>24</sup> we can surmise this theory of “the transformation of things” including both physical change and overtones of death likely existed from very early on. In contrast, the ideal in *Xiaoyaoyou*’s “Kun Becomes Peng” and *Qiwulun*’s “butterfly dream” is “the transformation of things,” thus enabling the acceptance that all things “become one” because “all things are equal and same (*wanwu qitong* 萬物齊同).” This is also consistent with *Tianxia*’s admiration to Zhuangzi, meaning it was likely one of the later additions to the *Zhuangzi*, perhaps around the time of the Later Warring States Period.

In summary, the *Zhuangzi*’s theory of “the transformation of things” may have existed in its earliest passages. As the text gradually became more or less complete, it may have also functioned as a summary, uniting different passages to form a unique epistemological worldview “embracing all things as equal.” In particular, the author(s) of *Xiaoyaoyou* and *Qiwulun* uses this fourth category of “transformation” to link together things from different times, spaces, modes of existence, and levels of understanding. This then forms the groundwork for arguing that, while things appear to be different, they are, in reality, all one thing.

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the phrase “death is the transformation of things” also appears in *Wenzi* (chapter *Jiushou* 九守, section *Shouxu* 守虛), though on the lips of Laozi. Without determining whether the “real” speaker was Zhuangzi or Laozi, the phrase “death is the transformation of things” has been adopted as a central dictum by both Laozi and Zhuangzi traditions during the Han period.

# Chapter 7

## The Ontology of the Vast and the Minute

### (*daxiao* 大小)



Steve Coutinho

#### Introduction

*Ruo the Northern Ocean said, “You can’t discuss the ocean with a frog in a well, because it’s stuck in its hole. You can’t talk about ice with a summer insect, because it’s limited by its season. And you can’t discuss the way with bent over scholars (shi 士), because they are tied down by their doctrines. But, only now that you have emerged from the cliffs and banks and gaze into the vast ocean, do you understand how pathetic you are. So now I can discuss the natural ordering (li 理) of Vastness with you.”<sup>1</sup>*

The concept of ‘vastness’ (*da* 大), and its contrary, ‘minuteness’ (*xiao* 小), occupies a central role in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. It is the main theme of the first of the Inner Chapters, the *Xiao Yao You* (逍遙遊, which I translate as “Wandering Beyond” [PWS 2018]), and structures the cosmological worldview of the ‘Zhuangzian’ strand of the text.<sup>2</sup>

Although typically classified as adjectives, meaning “big” and “small”, the terms may also be used nominally (‘vastness’, ‘the expansive’, ‘the small’) and verbally. When used as stative verbs, they may simply express the states of being, or becoming, relatively large or small. The terms can also express an implicit measure of value: the ‘greater’ or ‘grand’ in contrast with the ‘lesser’ or ‘petty’. Poetically, they evoke the processes of becoming relatively larger or smaller. This is especially noticeable in philosophical contexts, where the term “*da*” 大 has strong *processive*

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<sup>1</sup>Zhuang Zi. Chapter 17, *Qiu Shui* (“Autumn Floods”). I shall be quoting extensively from my translation in *Philosophers of the Warring States* (Coutinho and Hagen 2018). I shall refer to it with the abbreviation “PWS” in this essay.

<sup>2</sup>The *Zhuangzi* text contains several strands of Daoist philosophical thought. The Inner Chapters and a good proportion of the rest of the anthology (especially Chapter 17, the *Qiu Shui*), expound a broadly consistent philosophical approach, although they certainly embrace variations in different passages. I refer to this strand of thought with the loose adjective ‘Zhuangzian’. I prefer to avoid ‘Zhuangist’, which is too strongly suggestive of a follower (or worse, ‘disciple’) of ‘Zhuangism’. Another strand that I refer to below is the Utopian strand (roughly equivalent to Graham’s Primitivist and Yangist chapters).

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connotations of ‘expansion’ and ‘expansiveness’, regarding both size and inclusiveness of perspective. Conversely, “*xiao*” 小 has connotations of diminishing by contracting ever inwardly.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the grounding functional metaphor (implied in the *Zhuangzi*, and made explicit in the *Liezi*, as we shall see below) is that of ‘containment’, constituted by the processes of ‘expansion’ and ‘contraction’. Ontologically, we can think of a region of space, perhaps a sphere, expanding outwardly. Smaller regions of space can be thought of as contained within the larger sphere in a nested sequence. That which is most inclusive in scope would be the Cosmos itself, *tian* 天, the natural world in its entirety. It may be understood as the overarching context within which all the multiplicity and varieties of phenomena take their appropriate places. In the opposite direction, of ever decreasing magnitude, lie the minutiae, which constitute the innermost natural conditions of things. The human realm,<sup>4</sup> revealed in human perception and structured by human goals, values, and significances, lies somewhere between these two extremes, and looms largest in our own awareness.

The discussions of the vast and the minute have multiple inter-related dimensions of significance—ontological, phenomenological, epistemological, existential, and ethical—and these are explored holistically and simultaneously. Although the terms are primarily spatial, they have more general metaphorical applications. The expansion and contraction may, for example, also be understood temporally, phenomenologically, and pragmatically. Indeed, even the most abstruse discussion is understood to have pragmatic application. So, “*da*” or ‘vastness’ may characterize spatial size, temporal duration, phenomenological and spiritual perspective, or pragmatic context. In fact, this discussion of size expresses a deeper, more general concern with *all* kinds of ‘measure’ (or ‘value’): larger and smaller, enduring and ephemeral, more and less, higher and lower, better and worse. As we shall see, it raises the question: what happens to such measures (and values) when we realize that comparison is iterable, that is, that it can be repeated indefinitely?

The overall cosmological presupposition that underlies both the ontology and existential philosophy is that since *tian* constitutes the greatest overarching context within which everything is situated, humans cannot flourish to the fullest as natural beings unless we attempt to understand our natural and appropriate place within it. We then realize that we have been led astray by our human-centered values and artificial constructs, and must learn to realign ourselves with those grander Cosmic transformations that transcend them. The ideal Daoist life is one that leaves behind our ordinary limitations and dependencies (*dai* 待), and approaches the all-inclusive perspective of *tian*.<sup>5</sup> This is in contrast with the humanistic and socially oriented

<sup>3</sup>This sensibility is intensified in the *Liezi*.

<sup>4</sup>The title of Chapter Four of the Inner Chapters, *Ren Jian Shi* (人間世), refers to the world of human concern, the ‘realm’ (世) of human interconnection (人間).

<sup>5</sup>Note, however, that ‘the perspective of *tian*’ is not a coherent concept. This is because the Cosmos is not situated at a point. There can be no Cosmic perspective, because there is no point of view whose range is the Cosmos, because there is no point of view outside the Cosmos from which to view it. This tension, as we shall see, gives rise to different interpretations (from absolutist to rela-

philosophies of the Ruists, Mohists, and Legalists. They may recognize that *tian* is our Cosmic context, but in practice have a tendency to give the greatest significance and value to the human realm. Indeed, Xunzi derives all value from the human realm.

The Zhuangzian authors revel in the multiplicity of natural phenomena, the varieties of kind and of scale, expanding outwardly into the Cosmos, and turning inward to explore their innermost subtleties. For a human, exploration must be situated within a human perspective: that is, we investigate not only the ontological relationship between the vast and the minute, but from our intermediary position, we explore the nature of the relationships between the human and the vast on the one hand, and the human and the minute, on the other. It is these significances that give rise to practical, phenomenological, existential, and ethical questions.

Ontological expansion and contraction are explored phenomenologically: broader ‘perspectives’ expand beyond narrower perspectives. The more we experience of the world, the more aware we become of its immense variety, the more it appears to us to be potentially inexhaustible, the more its boundaries recede into an endless distance. And the closer attention we pay to the phenomena at hand, the more aware we become of their inner complexity: hidden within are deeper levels, perhaps even as grand and complex as what we see with the naked eye. However, the nature of the relationship between phenomenological perspectives is found to lack a means to provide a grounding measure.

In this paper I shall focus primarily on ontological and phenomenological issues, and will briefly consider some pragmatic implications at the end. In section I, I explore the conceptual issues concerning *da* and *xiao*, first in Chapter One of the Inner Chapters, “*Xiao Yao You*” (“Wandering Beyond”), and then show how this develops into a concern with the possibility of infinite iteration and radical relativism in the Outer Chapters, “*Qiu Shui*” (“Autumn Floods”). I also make a brief comparison with ideas developed in the *Liezi*. Several conceptual tensions arise when the iteration of comparative measure is understood perspectivally. Firstly, there can be no such thing as an ultimate Cosmic perspective, since a perspective is always situated from a position outside its range, and there can be nothing outside the range of the Cosmos. Secondly, if the Cosmos is infinite, what happens to all measures, if they become infinitesimal in comparison? And thirdly, how can any embodied creature transcend the perspective in which it is embedded?

The first tension has no resolution: the concept of a Cosmic ‘perspective’ can only function as a regulative, but unattainable, ideal. Regarding the second tension, some strands of the *Zhuangzi* attempt to draw a relativistic conclusion: all measures and perspectives must be equalized. In section II, I distinguish two senses of perspective—phenomenological and ontological—and argue that while forms of relativism *may* apply between phenomenological perspectives, this cannot be extended to the ontological regions over which they range. In section III, I briefly consider how this leads to recommendations of a quasi-stoic life from the perspective of the

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tivist) of the Zhuangzian philosophy of vastness: from both the contributors to the original anthology and from later interpreters.

Cosmos. I also raise the question whether it is possible for a creature to transcend the conditions of its own perspective. I will argue that, while it remains impossible for any finite being to fully overcome its embodied dependencies (*dai* 待) and adopt a Cosmic perspective, humans do nevertheless have the capacity to transform our perspectives to some degree.

## 1 Ontology, Cosmology, and Metaphysics

### 1.1 *Xiao Yao You*

In the first of the Inner Chapters, vastness is expressed through the most powerful metaphorical imagery, gargantuan creatures that extend through space. Kun is an impossibly voluminous sea creature, and Peng a bird with an impossibly large wingspan<sup>6</sup>; and creatures that extend by orders of magnitude through time: the Mingling and the Chun. They are contrasted with small creatures whose limitations prevent them from understanding perspectives more extensive than their own. Disputes between the smaller and greater creatures are presented as analogies of disputes between humanist and Cosmic philosophies respectively.

From the humanistic perspectives of the Ruists, Mohists, and Legalists, the matters of human life expand to fill our attention. What is of greatest concern is our social context, our relationships, and the values and structures we need to adopt in order to live together harmoniously. The Cosmic expanse in which this perspective is embedded remains peripheral; it recedes far into the background, for the most part beyond our immediate awareness. Even if *tian* is acknowledged as the ultimate origin of things, it isn't the center of focus in these humanistic philosophies. Particularly notable, and perhaps the explicit target of Daoist critique in the Utopian chapters,<sup>7</sup> is Xunzi's attitude towards nature as an unruly wilderness that must be transformed through human intelligence and artifice before it can become useful or beautiful. From this perspective, those who rhapsodize about the grandness of the Cosmos are concerned with absurd flights of fancy that are of little human concern.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Xiao Yao You*, the *Zhuangzi* explicitly represents this criticism in the attitudes of the little creatures: "Now, those whose understanding is apt for one position in office, whose conduct is suitable for one village, whose political efficacy (*de*) measures up to that of one ruler, and whose capacity manifests in one state, view themselves in just the same way." (PWS 2018: 335) This is reiterated in the

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<sup>6</sup>Reference is made to a text called "The Questions of Tang". There is also a chapter in the *Liezi*, perhaps deliberately given the same name, in which the issue of the relationship between the vast and the minute is developed further.

<sup>7</sup>Conceptually, the Utopian chapters read as though they are a direct response to Xun Zi. If this is correct, these chapters of the anthology must have been written later.

<sup>8</sup>As Xunzi says in Chapter 21, *Dissolving Beguilement*, "Zhuang Zi was beguiled by *tian* and did not appreciate the role of the human." (PWS 2018: 204)

subsequent stories where Huizi (representing the humanist perspective) criticizes a huge gourd as useless for making everyday utensils (bowls and ladles), and a vast tree as too twisted and warped to be of use to a carpenter who needs to be able to mold nature in accordance with artificial measuring devices (compasses and square). He goes on to say that Zhuangzi's philosophy of vastness is also useless.<sup>9</sup> Grandiose doctrines that rhapsodize about the Cosmos and extol overcoming the human perspective to live from a Cosmic distance, with natural indifference to social and human values, seem warped and worthless from a humanistic point of view. In a similar vein, Jian Wu criticizes the doctrines (*yan* 言) of Jie Yu, the madman of Chu, as strange, grand and limitless (*wuji* 無極), "not even coming close to the human condition (*ren qing* 人情)". (PWS 2018: 338).

Within the human realm there are many doctrines articulated from different humanistic perspectives. Each proposes a different *dao*, dealing with the same issues in contrasting ways.<sup>10</sup> The Jin dynasty scholar, Guo Xiang reads the Inner Chapters as promoting a relativism that equalizes all such doctrines and perspectives: each considers itself right from within its own limited point of view.<sup>11</sup> While the small birds cannot understand the large bird, it is also true that the large bird cannot understand the perspectives of the smaller birds. And the vast perspective of Peng has its own constraints: vast wings can only be supported by an accumulated depth of air. Any claim to be a better perspective is simply made from another perspective, and therefore not to be considered of any greater significance.

But this reading seems inconsistent with the text itself: the smaller creatures are explicitly criticized precisely because their smaller perspective constrains their understanding. "How could those two little birds understand this? Petty understanding cannot match vast understanding. And the short-lived cannot compare with the long-lived." (PWS 2018: 334) "*Xiao*" thus also signifies the *pettiness* of our ordinary attitudes, the short-sightedness of our socially oriented values. Again, Lian Shu criticizes Jian Wu for his incomprehension, saying it arises from a kind of *blindness* or *deafness* of the understanding. And similarly, *Zhuangzi* criticizes Huizi for his inability to understand the non-functionalist 'use' of the vast.<sup>12</sup> Humanist philosophers are thus explicitly criticized for failing to understand things from a Cosmic point of view. The rebuttal of the humanist critiques of vastness is clearly made: the mutual critiques are not held to be equal. Without the explicit equalization, we do

<sup>9</sup>It is interesting to note that this type of critique of Daoist concerns is consistent with Mohist functionalism (though Hui Zi is not usually taken to be a Mohist). (PWS 2018: 341)

<sup>10</sup>In a meta-philosophical move, some of these *daos* (those of Xun Zi, the Syncretists, and the Daoists, for example) claim to represent higher or more inclusive perspectives than others.

<sup>11</sup>This is, indeed, the line of interpretation favored by perhaps the majority of modern western interpreters, for example, A. C. Graham, Chad Hansen, Hans-Georg Moeller, and Brook Ziporyn.

<sup>12</sup>That is, its usefulness for wandering beyond the restrictions and limitations of the human condition, into a natural realm of indeterminacy that has the potential to enable us to extend our lives to their natural limits. (PWS 2018: 340)



not have an explicit statement of radical relativism.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that we cannot find it elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi* anthology. Indeed, it is one of the central issues raised in the *Qiu Shui* chapter, which I discuss next. Since *da* and *xiao* are sometimes equalized in this chapter, I now translate the term “*xiao*” (小) as ‘minute’ instead of ‘petty’.

## 1.2 *Qiu Shui*

The philosophy of vastness is developed in significant ways in what are probably later segments of the anthology, most notably in the *Autumn Floods* chapter (Chapter 17, *Qiu Shui*). It is here that we find explicit arguments for radical relativism, as we shall see below. However, it is intriguing that other philosophical positions also appear to be explored (pragmatism, for example, and even a possible form of absolutism). In the following I refer to my translation in *Philosophers of the Warring States*, where I divide the chapter into several sections, (a) to (g). I use those paragraph references in this section to distinguish the various stages of discussion.

The chapter begins, section (a), with the Lord of the Yellow River, He Bo, congratulating himself on being the epitome of vastness, containing all smaller things, oblivious of the possibility of a vastness beyond his own. It is only when he confronts the Northern Ocean, Bei Hai, that he becomes aware of his own limitations, and stands humbled and reduced to size. But Bei Hai reminds him that this same process can be iterated indefinitely: the ocean may seem vast in comparison with the rivers that feed into it, but it pales in significance in comparison with Heaven and Earth. He uses the term “*li*” (理) to refer to the recursively embedded patterns of containment between the larger and the smaller, where what seems at first large becomes a minor detail when viewed from a larger, overarching perspective.

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<sup>13</sup> There are, moreover, several problems with Guo Xiang’s approach. Firstly, we must be careful not to hastily equate conditions with limitations. To assert that something has specific conditions (even conditions hard to achieve) is not necessarily to critique it as having limitations, except in the most trivial sense that any condition can be thought of as a kind of limitation. The fact that all things have their own conditions does not, by itself, constitute a reason for equalizing either the things or their conditions. *Prima facie*, some conditions are more limiting than others. In fact, the statement that Peng must exert extraordinary effort to attain its higher perspective is simply a description of the kind of effort required to attain a Cosmic perspective of the kind cultivated by the Daoist. It takes a great effort to attain wisdom, though this wisdom may seem ‘foolish’ from a conventional perspective; a naïve or narrow-minded person cannot understand the world from the perspective of the wise. And there is an important sense in which the perspective of a narrow-minded person may make no sense to a wise person. But it does not follow that this *condition* of wisdom is a ‘limitation’ on a par with that of the narrow-minded person’s inability to understand the perspective of the wise.

### 1.2.1 Situation in the *Zhuangzi*, and Containment in the *Liezi*

The Northern Ocean expresses the relation between the small and the vast in terms of the relationship of being ‘situated within’: 在; 在...之間; 在...內; 處. This is explicitly applied to the relationship between humans and the Cosmos (and between the political territories of the human world within the vaster natural context of the surrounding oceans):

“My presence in the world (在天地之間) is like a pebble or sapling on (在) a great mountain. How could I take myself to be much when I remain aware of my paltriness? When you assess the four seas against the Cosmos in which they lie (在天地之間), don’t they seem like a puddle in (在) a vast marsh? When you reckon the extent of the Central States within the four seas (在海內), doesn’t it seem like a mere grain in (在) a vast silo?” (PWS 2018: 343)

As this process of expansion is iterated, the resulting perspective levels are thought of as being nested in a series (perhaps of concentric spheres). This ‘fractal’ type of patterning continues indefinitely, each stage of magnification (or, loosely speaking, ‘order of magnitude’), making the previous stage seem as petty as the prior stage in comparison.

In the *Liezi*, in Chapter 5, named “The Questions of Tang”, this relationship is expressed in terms of ‘being contained’, and conversely: ‘containment’ (*han* 含):

“Thus, there are *inexhaustible* and *endless* relations of containment between the greater and the lesser. Just as it contains the myriad things, so (something) contains the Cosmos. Containing the myriad things is indeed limitless; containing the Cosmos is also indeed endless. How do I know that enclosing [each] Cosmos is not another vaster Cosmos?” *Liezi*, 5.1 (my translation) 故大小相含, 无窮極也。含萬物者亦如含天地; 含萬物也故不窮, 含天地也故无極。朕亦焉知天地之表不有大天地者乎?

That which is more encompassing is understood as containing that which is less encompassing: if A is situated within (在) B, then B contains (含) A, and by the process of iteration, B may itself be contained by something larger still. The converse process is also explicitly inferred: contracting inwards to the inexhaustible (*wu jin* 無盡), diminishing endlessly without ever being used up.<sup>14</sup> The concept of limitless (*wu ji*) expansion appears to be a formulation of the concept of the infinite;<sup>15</sup> conversely, the process of inexhaustible (*wu jin*) contraction appears to be a formulation of the infinitesimal.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The Shang emperor Tang asks whether in the process of expansion one reaches the outer extremes, *ji* 極, and whether the process of contraction inwards is exhaustible, *jin* 盡.

<sup>15</sup> In *Qiu Shui*, the notion of the infinite is first raised, and is characterized as that which is neither increased when added to, nor decreased when subtracted from. (PWS 2018: 343) We will also see another formulation of the infinite and the infinitesimal discussed in section (c) of the *Qiu Shui*, below.

<sup>16</sup> But this passage also seems to hint at a notion of the transfinite: infinities beyond infinity. “Beyond (*wai* 外) the limitless is another limitless nothing; within the inexhaustible is another inexhaustible nothing.” See Coutinho 2014: 160–162 for further discussion.

Returning to the *Qiu Shui*, in section (b), He Bo asks whether the Cosmos, here referred to as “*tian di*”, ‘the heavens and the earth’ can be taken to be large, and a wisp of down (presumably, the smallest thing visible to the naked eye) to be small. But Bei Hai replies that Great understanding (or understanding of the process of expansion) is aware that this process of comparative measurement (*liang* 量) is inexhaustible (*wu qiong* 無窮). And so, great understanding does not take the small to be ‘little’ (*gua* 寡) or the vast to be ‘much’ (*duo* 多). (PWS 2018: 344) Therefore, we cannot know what marks the limits of the greatest (*zhi da zhi yu* 至大之域) or least in size (*zhi xi zhi ni* 至細之倪).

An epistemological claim is also made. Since our lives are limited in time, our knowledge must also be limited. The not unreasonable assumption here, of course, is that only finite amounts of knowledge can be acquired in finite amounts of time: whatever exists, will always escape our capacity to know or understand, no matter how extensive our experience of the world becomes. Though this epistemological conclusion is compatible with ontological absolutism, it also hints at a more radical conclusion that undermines the very meaningfulness of comparative measure: the vast is not in any sense ‘more’ than the small, and the small is not in any sense ‘lesser’ than the vast. We will see this implication developed further in section (d) below. This can be understood as a form of radical relativism: there is no sense in which any perspective is greater or lesser than any other.

In the next section (c), the question of what is ultimate (*zhi* 至) is raised again, but this time with regard to the form (*xing* 形) of the utterly fine essence (至精), and the encompassability (可圍) of the utterly vast (至大). If the Cosmos and a wisp of down don’t mark the limits of the full range of the vast and the minute, what about the extremes of minuteness (the finest essence), and vastness (the unencompassable)? This time, Bei Hai explores what appears to be an ontologically *realist* response, making a distinction between that which is confined within observable limits, and that which goes beyond. The observable characteristics of the empirical world, the world of form, can be characterized in terms of degrees on a scale of ‘fineness’ and ‘coarseness’. Phenomenologically, creatures have upper and lower limits to the size of objects they are able to perceive. The smallest creatures cannot perceive the largest objects, and the largest creatures are unable to perceive the smallest objects. Within the limits of this range of perceivability, phenomena are both describable (for humans, presumably) and thinkable, but only within the limits of this range: the coarse marks the upper range of what is describable (可以言論者); while the fineness of things marks the lower limit that can be reached by thought (可以意致者).

The *finest* essence (*zhi jing* 至精), however, is the unattainable limiting condition: the endpoint of the result of diminishing if it ever could be achieved. And since there is a lower limit to the threshold of perceivability, after which the fine loses its perceptible form, at the unattainable extreme it would effectively be formless, 無形. Moreover, since only what has form can be subdivided (分), the formless cannot be subdivided (不能分). The only indivisible would be that which has *nothing* to

divide.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the coarse at its extreme expands beyond the upper limits of what can be encompassed (可圍). These appear, again, to be adumbrations of concepts of the infinitesimal and the infinite.

In section (d), Lord River asks, “How far can we extend things, inwardly and outwardly, to the limiting points (*ni* 倪) of value (*gui* 貴) and inferiority (*jian* 賤), or the limiting points of the small and the vast?” (PWS 2018: 346) Here, Bei Hai draws an explicitly radically relativistic conclusion. If there truly is no limit to vastness or to the exhaustion of minuteness, then there is no such thing as the greatest and the least. Each thing is bigger than something and smaller than something else. But from the perspective of the way (if it could ever be attained) nothing is vast and nothing is minute. It is only when you can know how to attribute *either* quality that you truly understand the measure of value (which is that it has no ultimate value). In the next section, I shall explore the phenomenological and ontological significances of this claim.

## 2 Phenomenology vs Ontology

“Perspective” can refer to a point of view, but it also includes the ‘region’ of the world that is revealed in perceptually and cognitively specific ways from that location. But the concept of a perspective is not purely ontological: it is defined with reference to a subject. The subject is located at a ‘point of view’, a finite location within the world from which that world is perceived and understood. Its phenomenological range and limits (of perception and understanding) are determined, not only by that location, but also by the subject’s perceptual and cognitive capacities. From each point of view, the world manifests in distinctively different ways. I shall refer to the phenomenological manifestation of the region over which a perspective ranges as a ‘realm’.<sup>18</sup>

In general, what any creature is able to understand (and *how* it is understood) arises from within spatial, temporal, perceptual and cognitive perspectives, and is molded by the conditions of these perspectives.<sup>19</sup> What a creature takes to be vast or considers to be a long time, for example, depends on its particular spatial and temporal dimensions, perceptual constraints, and cognitive abilities. What appears large from a less inclusive spatial perspective appears smaller from a more inclusive (‘higher’) perspective. What appears more enduring from a less inclusive temporal perspective appears more ephemeral from a more inclusive temporal perspective.

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<sup>17</sup>This, incidentally, is directly contrary to the Greek concept of the atom, according to which the smallest physical *form* must be indivisible.

<sup>18</sup>Some terminology: Perspective A is ‘higher’ than that of B if the region (or scope) over which A ranges contains that over which B ranges. The range of a perspective, A, is broader than that of B if the realm revealed by B is contained within the realm revealed by A.

<sup>19</sup>This will lead to a paradox regarding the possibility of overcoming such limitations, which we will explore in section III.

When confined in a small space, the nearby objects surrounding you may fill up your field of vision. A cellar, for example, may be filled with earthenware jars. In an imperial palace, large statues may fill the hall. A quarry may be filled with large boulders. From a mountain top, one sees an array of magnificent peaks. As one moves from cellar to palace to quarry to mountain top, the scope over which one's field of vision ranges increases (while the field itself remains identical): a palace hall is physically larger than a cellar; a quarry is larger than a palace hall; a mountain range is larger than a quarry. And yet, in each case, the objects one sees may occupy the same proportion of our visual field: the mountain peak takes up no greater area in our visual field than an earthenware jar does when we are in a cellar. If the jar can still be seen from the mountain top, it takes up a very small fraction of the visual field, and seems minute in comparison with a mountain.<sup>20</sup>

Phenomenologically, the units of comparative measure *within* each order of magnitude manifest in a structurally isomorphic way in comparison with realms at other hierarchical levels. One perspective may be contained in another, but units appear functionally identical across contexts. This means there is no way to tell from phenomenological proportions of the visual field alone where exactly in the series of nested spheres we are situated objectively, that is, which ontological level we are observing (the objective size of the objects). This can be applied also to our awareness of time: a spring for Mingling, for example, may last a thousand years, but phenomenologically it may feel no different from one spring at a lower level. Indeed, it is not clear how we could even make a meaningful comparison between such experiences of time.<sup>21</sup>

If it were possible for a single subject to be aware of any two realms simultaneously (or in separate experiences), it would not be able to tell, from the relative proportions occupied within the fields alone, how the ontological regions of the world that they each reveal stand in relation to each other: which is at a higher level and which is lower. Thus, relativism may well apply phenomenologically between perspectives. There may be an incommensurability between the measures of phenomena revealed in different phenomenological realms. What counts as 'more' or 'less' phenomenologically cannot be held constant between them if there is no independently accessible unit of measure against which to measure.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Conversely, if a mountain top could be seen from the window of a cellar, it might take up a smaller fraction of the visual field than a jar. The proportion of the visual field it occupies is of course inversely proportional to the objective distance of the object. But note that this does not change anything about the objective relation between the mountain and the jar. Indeed, it depends on the objective proportions remaining constant.

<sup>21</sup> Recall, however, that in the *Xiao Yao You*, equality in value between the short- and long-lived is *not* the explicit conclusion of the text (though it is often the conclusion of interpreters). Rather, it is that the small cannot match the vast, either in understanding or in years.

<sup>22</sup> However, even in such cases, phenomenological commensurability cannot be ruled out altogether. What are we to say about the following cases, for example: What appears small from one perspective (a mouse to a human, perhaps) may conceivably be interpreted as appearing larger from some higher perspective (perhaps with the acute vision of an eagle, or with some kind of divine perception). Or again, consider a larger creature that has a large realm of vision, but has

However, even if we cannot make a meaningful comparison across phenomenological realms when viewed simultaneously, it does not follow that we would not be able to distinguish levels if we were able to observe the *continuous transition* as we ascend or descend from one level to the next. The transition would entail an intermediate sequence that reveals which realm is contained within the limits of the other. This is because the sequence of the nested series of *ontological* regions does not vary.

But the *Qiu Shui* slips beyond the phenomenological and seems to imply that this radical equalization applies to all ontological measures and values: “When great understanding [or: understanding of vastness] observes the near and the distant, it does not take the small to be little or the vast to be much, because it understands that measure is inexhaustible.” (PWS 2018: 344) Here, the very notion of quantity (‘little’ and ‘much’) seems to be undermined. At first, the issue seems to be one merely of visual perspective: something seems smaller if it is further away. But, if this were the issue, it would be a defense of absolutism, not relativism. Rather, the reason explicitly given (that measure is inexhaustible) goes beyond perspective, and suggests that difference in quantity dissolves because comparative measure may continue indefinitely.

If so, it is not only that phenomenological ‘realms’ cannot be compared, but that the ontological regions they reveal are also incommensurable. The assumption in this passage seems to be that any objectively finite measure dissolves infinitesimally in relation to the infinite, and from that standpoint, all measures effectively reduce to nothing. Since any spatial region is nested within an infinite series of more expansive regions, and contains an infinite series of nested regions, this means that there is no region that could constitute an absolute starting point, end point, or mid-point. Any sphere in the infinite series of container/contained is an equally legitimate mid-point. Thus, when one sees things in relation to the inexhaustible, one understands that there is no absolute maximum or minimum. One realizes the radical equivalence of all other measures: everything is big, even a wisp of down, and everything is minute, even Mount Tai.

However, while an infinite series has no absolute maximum or minimum, this by itself does not undermine the distinction between ‘more’ and ‘less’. Although they are relational terms, relative *scale* (given by the *sequence* of nesting) is not undermined. The argument from the relativity of ‘more’ and ‘less’ does not entail any symmetry: the relation of ‘greater than’ is transitive, but it is not symmetrical. And the same goes for the relationship of containing and being contained. The series from smaller to larger does not change order. The mathematical relations between the larger and smaller (and between the containing and contained) remain identical. If  $A > B$  and  $B > C$ , it does not follow from the fact that  $B$  also stands in the relation ‘greater than’ to  $C$  that  $B$  is not  $< A$ , or that  $B$  and  $A$  are somehow radically equalized.

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cataracts, and is unable to distinguish anything within it. Compare this with a microscopic creature that has fine-tuned microvision within its own realm (if such a thing were biologically possible). It seems intuitively plausible that we might want to say that the smaller creature has a larger realm than the larger creature (though the corresponding ontological region is smaller).

Nor is this undermined by the recognition that the sequence of comparison may continue infinitely. Indeed, comparison of finite measures with infinity is not a mathematically meaningful comparison. Since ‘infinity’ is not a number, division by infinity is not a meaningful procedure: as mathematicians, say, it is ‘undefined’, not equal to zero.<sup>23</sup> Further, nothing follows about the sequence of numbers: even if one million is vanishingly small in comparison with infinity, this does not entail that it is not greater than one. Ontologically the earth is larger than a mountain, even if it is also smaller than the sun, and the sun is smaller than a galaxy, and a galaxy is smaller than a galactic cluster, and so on. Even if a mountain is vanishingly small in relation to infinite space, this does not entail that it is ontologically equal to or smaller than a wisp of down on an autumn hair.<sup>24</sup>

### 3 Stoicism and the Possibility of Transcending Perspectival Conditions

While all this discussion might seem purely theoretical, its real significance for a Daoist philosopher is practical and existential. Sections (f) and (g) of the *Qiu Shui*, thus, raise questions about the practical and ethical consequences of being situated within a vast (and indifferent) Cosmos, and answers are given that echo the quasi-stoic philosophy promoted in the *Da Zong Shi*.<sup>25</sup>

From our everyday human perspective, we remain immersed in the dramas of our lives. We live in an attitude of absorbed concern, investing our fortunes and misfortunes with the greatest significance. Our lives derive meaning and purpose from our social roles, and we play along without question, taking our successes and failures very seriously. This humanistic perspective is also infused with artificial significance, created and projected from a human perspective. We shape not only our environments but also ourselves in accordance with these artificially constructed values and goals. But, from a Cosmic perspective, these humanistic constructs are a distortion of our genuine, natural humanity. In Chapter Four of the Inner Chapters, *Ren Jian Shi*, the Zhuangzian Daoists warn that such artificial ambitions are potentially dangerous: if we fail, we risk punishment and even death. Moreover, even if we are successful, the distortion is itself a form of serious damage. Instead of a spontaneous enjoyment of the flourishing of life, we live with the constant threat of

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<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to my esteemed colleague, Linda McGuire, Professor of Mathematics, for her enlightening discussions of the mathematics of infinity.

<sup>24</sup> If the ‘relativist’ point is only that a mountain is smaller than some things, while a wisp of down is larger than other things, this is not a particularly interesting point. And it does not, by itself, undermine any deep ontological intuitions.

<sup>25</sup> In section (e), a form of pragmatic contextualism is briefly considered regarding the specialized abilities in specific contexts. But this promising response is, unfortunately, rather hastily undermined by drawing a skeptical conclusion regarding all evaluation. Skepticism, however, does not follow logically from pragmatic contextualism.



grief, fear, anger, and anxiety, sometimes risking our own lives and the lives of others.

The challenge of a Zhuangzian Daoist, then, is to somehow cultivate a natural life in tune with the Cosmos at the *human* level: ‘genuine’ humanity (*zhen ren*). Genuineness is associated with naturalness, and a genuinely natural life is one that rejects artificial constructs. Instead we are encouraged to rise above this narrow-minded perspective, and to evaluate from the vast perspective of the Cosmos.<sup>26</sup> When we do so, we overturn our everyday social judgments.<sup>27</sup> In *Da Zong Shi*, Zhuangzi’s Confucius says, “Strange people may be ‘strange’ to humans, but are equal to the Cosmos (*tian*). Thus, it is said, ‘A noble among humans is a petty person to the Cosmos; while a petty person among humans is a noble to the Cosmos’.” (Coutinho 2018: 358).

It is not until we expand our horizons and encounter a vaster perspective that we acquire a standpoint from which to witness our lives from the outside, as it were. From a distance, we are less moved by the drama we observe. The *higher* the perspective—the *broad*er its range—the smaller and less significant these dramatic scenes appear. As we move further in the direction of ‘the’ elevated perspective of the Cosmos, the concerns that arise in the particular stories of individual lives seem increasingly trivial and less overwhelming. The attempt to place our own dramas in such vaster contexts, thus enables us to cultivate an attitude of tranquility. As we have seen, however, a question arises about the very possibility of transcending the perspective within which a creature is embedded.

In some strands of the *Zhuangzi*, we are encouraged to expand our perspectives to the point where we recognize the need, on the one hand, to abandon our human perspective, and on the other, to cultivate and adopt the all-embracing ‘perspective’ of *tian*. This ideal may be interpreted in various ways: an absolutist interpretation, for example, would see it as the attempt to, in some sense, ‘embrace’ everything inclusively. A skeptical interpretation might see it as the practice of undermining every particular limited viewpoint that claims to be objective. A relativist interpretation may see it as the capacity to shift between perspectives regarding none as preferable from outside of any particular point of view.

However, as noted earlier, a problem follows from the natural embeddedness of finite creatures within their perspectives. Is it even possible to adopt a perspective from a different level, if a creature is an embodied being that is embedded within a specific perspective? Being subject to the conditions of any particular region would seem to entail perceptual, cognitive and phenomenological limitations for

<sup>26</sup> And to preserve the fullest extent of our natural lifespan we must escape the world of social and political intrigue.

<sup>27</sup> Note that this stands in uneasy tension with the relativism expressed in the *Qiu Shui*, insofar as the latter draws the conclusion that all values and perspectives are to be *equalized*. If the vast and the petty are equalized then why should we adopt the supposedly flexible perspective of the Way? How can we claim that a flexible perspective is in any sense preferable to an inflexible one without abandoning our radical relativism? There appears to be no internally consistent answer to this question.

organisms that inhabit that region. Perceptual faculties have biological conditions relative to each creature. The wren and the vole, for example, have physiological conditions that are a function of their niche they occupy in the ecosystem of their particular region.

Humans, as natural creatures, are no less subject to the limitations of their contextual conditions than any other creature. But this would surely also set limiting conditions on our capacity to expand our perspectives. In the *Xiao Yao You*, the *Zhuangzi* says that Master Song Rong managed to rise above his circumstances, but remarks that he is still tied down by the dependent conditions (*dai* 待) of his initial context, which prevented him from being able to align with the axis of the Cosmos.<sup>28</sup> Surely, however, this Cosmic ideal of casting off all dependencies and overcoming all limitations is an unattainable one.

If it were possible for unconditioned, disembodied beings with infinite malleability to exist, there might be no problem. But it is unclear if that is even a coherent supposition. And humans certainly are embodied beings constrained by our particular cognitive and perceptual conditions. Indeed, any type of phenomenological awareness must have its conditions.<sup>29</sup> These conditions provide not only our starting point, but also our situation: we may supplement our perception, our bodies, and our capacities for movement, but we remain finite embodied beings (with species-specific and individual-specific empirical conditions). While we may train our senses to become more refined, there are limits beyond which they cannot be modified. And while they may be artificially enhanced with technologies, there nevertheless remain biological restrictions that can never be completely overcome.

Phenomenologically, we can use a microscope to observe the world at a microscopic level, but we still see with human eyes, and therefore from a human perspective. We are not really perceiving or understanding the world as it is perceived or 'understood' by microscopic creatures with microscopic conditions of light sensitivity. In a similar way, if we climb a high mountain, as Xunzi notes, we can see much further. But we are still seeing the world from a human perspective, not as a creature the size of a mountain might perceive it. Indeed, when we look out of the window of a plane, we might observe the earth from the sky, but we do not necessarily observe the earth as an eagle does, or as Peng would. We perceive the earth precisely as a *human* would from that perspective.

Nevertheless, despite these conditions, humans do appear to have a paradoxical capacity for self-transcendence: while other creatures may (so far as we know) be confined by their cognitive limitations, the human mind seems to have the capacity, not only to understand its own limitations, but to begin to ponder the possibility of alternatives. This capacity to apparently transcend our limiting conditions arises from two sources: our imaginations and our conceptual understanding.

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<sup>28</sup> "If, however, you were to mount the axis of the Cosmos, and harness the changes of the six energies (*qi*) in order to wander through the inexhaustible, what then would there be to depend on (*dai* 待)?" (PWS 2018: 336)

<sup>29</sup> Even a disembodied consciousness would have to have its particular conditions under which an object could be made available to it.

We are able to *imagine* the possibility of spaces and times far beyond what can be contained in human experience; and we can imagine the possibility of creatures with incomparable cognitive capacities inhabiting those perspectives. The power of imagination in some sense ‘detaches’ sensory experience from empirical restrictions. Further, we can attempt to disassociate sensory experiences and then modify them and recombine them in ways that not only allow us to imagine unexperienced objectivities, but also appear to allow us to imagine other kinds of perceptual possibilities: the ‘sonic’ worlds of bats or dolphins, perhaps, or sensitivity to magnetic fields.

Similarly, while there must be conditions shaping human *conceptual* cognition, these come with a flexibility that appears to allow indefinite expansion and development. We can acquire and define new concepts and with them create ever more complex concepts that increase our cognitive power (through increasing our cognitive efficiency). Perhaps it is for this reason that philosophers have speculated that humans have the capacity to transcend our limitations. Though we are finite beings, we are able to *conceive* of boundless space and time without end or beginning, and are able to break the boundaries of finitude and contemplate the infinite and the infinitesimal. Though we nevertheless do so from within the natural limitations of the capacities of the imagination and cognition for self-transformation.

Thus, while other creatures appear (for all we can tell) to remain entirely confined by the conditions of embeddedness of their situated perspectives, humans do appear to have the capacity, at least partially, to overcome these limitations. If we cannot entirely abandon our human perspective, we can let go of at least some of the interests and evaluations that arise from within that perspective. By doing so, we are able to internalize ever more expansive outlooks that cultivate tranquility and enable us to accept the vicissitudes of life with equanimity. We can adopt a quasi-stoic perspective that also diminishes the hold of our value judgments, even if it remains impossible to cultivate a fully transcendent ‘perspective’. For the Daoist recommendation to be consistently promoted, the direction of increasing vastness must be distinguishable from the direction of increasing pettiness, or there would be nothing for Bei Hai to have learnt, and no sense in critiquing the frog in the well for being unaware of the ocean.

## 4 Conclusion

The discussion of the vastness and minuteness of the Cosmos is thus simultaneously theoretical and pragmatic. The Cosmos itself is recognized as that which is all-embracing: it is the origin and the home of all things. Everything within is minuscule in comparison with its grandness. The way recommended by the Daoists is to understand the significance of this vastness and to allow our own petty perspectives to reduce in significance. Pragmatically, a life lived in awareness of the infinite Cosmos would no longer feel a strong compulsion to judge itself by humanistic standards. But since the Cosmos is endless and inexhaustible, the ‘perspective’ of

the Cosmos is an unattainable ideal. The recommendation to align ourselves with its vastness then, seems to have a number of ‘antinomous’ consequences:<sup>30</sup> the trivialization of all intra-worldly perspectives might seem to make them equally right (relativism), or equally wrong (nihilism), or equally unknowable (skepticism). Different strands of the *Zhuangzi* text follow these strands in different directions. But we have seen that the supposed equalization depends on a mathematical mistake about the relationship of the finite to the infinite: there is no meaningful comparison of any measure with the infinite, and all infinitesimals cannot be equalized. While there may be no common ground on which to make meaningful comparisons between phenomenological perspectives, this relativity does not extend to the measures over which they range.

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<sup>30</sup> Kant argues that reason leads us to antinomies: mutually contradictory possibilities that are apparently unresolvable.

## Chapter 8

# The True Person (*zhen ren* 真人) and True Knowledge (*zhen zhi* 真知) in the *Zhuangzi*



Keqian Xu

## 1 Introduction

The Chinese character “*zhen* 真,” which has the semantic meanings of “true,” “truthfulness,” “real,” “genuine,” “actual,” “authentic,” etc., is a commonly used word of high frequency in both classic and modern Chinese, as well as a concept with important philosophical significance. In modern Chinese academic discourse, it has often been mentioned together with two other concepts, namely, “*shan* 善 (goodness)” and “*mei* 美 (beauty),” representing the three most important values pursued by human beings in science, ethics and aesthetics, respectively. However, studies have found that in the texts of the first batch of the early ancient Chinese classics transmitted in the tradition of Confucianism, such as the so called “*Five Classics*” and their earliest commentaries, *The Analects of Confucius* and the *Mencius*, etc., while both “*shan* 善” and “*mei* 美” are frequently mentioned and discussed, the character “*zhen* 真” is not mentioned even once, let alone discussed as a philosophical concept. “*Zhen*” as a significant and important philosophical concept first appeared in the pre-Qin Daoist texts, particularly the *Zhuangzi*. Actually,

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K.-c. Chong (ed.), *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi*, Dao

Companions to Chinese Philosophy 16,

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92331-0\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92331-0_8)

the word “*zhen*” was seldom used in any extant pre-Qin texts earlier than the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>1</sup> However, “*zhen*” appears in the extant *Zhuangzi* more than sixty times, in both the “Inner Chapters,” the “Outer Chapters” and the “Miscellaneous Chapters,” either being used as a monosyllable noun or adjective, or appearing in some compound words, creating a series of important concepts in Zhuangzi’s philosophy, such as “*zhen ren* 真人 (true person),” “*zhen xing* 真性 (true nature),” “*zhen zai* 真宰 (true lord),” “*zhen jun* 真君 (true ruler),” “*zhen zhi* 真知 (true knowledge),” “*zhen shi* 真是 (truly being),” etc. Afterwards, the word “*zhen*” was widely used in many other literatures in the later Warring States period and the early Western Han Dynasty, such as *Xunzi*, *Hanfeizi*, *Lü Shi Chun Qiu*, *Huai Nan Zi*, etc., and eventually became a very important concept in traditional Chinese philosophy and religions, especially in the Daoist tradition. Therefore we can say that it was Zhuangzi who first introduced the concept of “*zhen*” and revealed its important philosophical meanings in the *Zhuangzi*. This can be considered a great contribution that Zhuangzi has made to ancient Chinese philosophy (Xu 2002: 93–94).

However, due to the different meanings of the character “*zhen*” in different contexts in the *Zhuangzi*, together with Zhuangzi’s unique and extraordinary ways of literary expression, there are still many problems in understanding and interpreting the exact meaning of “*zhen*” and its related concepts such as “*zhen ren*” (true person), “*zhen zhi*” (true knowledge) etc., in the *Zhuangzi*. Scholars have conducted some researches on this topic (see Xu 2002; Yang 2006; Wu 2007; Chong 2011; Zhang 2011; D’Ambrosio 2015; Wang 2016, etc.), but their understandings and opinions differ. Some scholars try to explore the mythological origin of “*zhen*” and “*zhen ren*” from the texts of ancient Chinese myths; others intend to interpret the “*zhen*” from the sense of Western existentialist theory of authenticity, suggesting some relation between Zhuangzi’s philosophy with the contemporary existentialist philosophy.

In this chapter, I will provide some interpretation, analysis and discussion on the relevant texts from the *Zhuangzi* related to the concepts of “*zhen*,” “*zhen ren*” and “*zhen zhi*,” etc., attempting to give an explanation of these concepts as consistently as possible with the original texts and thought in the *Zhuangzi*.

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<sup>1</sup>The character “*zhen* 真” is used three times in the received version of *Laozi*, appearing in chapter 21, chapter 41 and chapter 54 respectively. Scholars have different opinions on the completion date of the received version of *Laozi*, some suspect that it might be completed later than *Zhuangzi*. In 1993, a batch of bamboo slips with texts related to *Laozi* has been excavated in a Warring States Tomb in Guodian Village, Jingmen City, Hubei Province, which has been considered the earliest version of *Laozi*. However, the three “*zhen* 真” characters cannot be found in this bamboo version of *Laozi*. The whole chapter 21 is not included in the bamboo version, in the bamboo slips related to the other two chapters, namely chapter 41 and 54, the character “*zhen* 真” is replaced by another character “*zhen* 貞”(Jingmen Museum 1998: 8, 118). I will discuss the possible relation between these two characters shortly. Archeologists have dated the tomb at no earlier than the mid of the Warring State Period, when Zhuangzi might still be alive. In other words, even if there was an early version of *Laozi* in Zhuangzi’s time, it might not include the character “*zhen* 真” yet.

## 2 The Concept of “*Zhen*” and Its Philosophical Significance

In *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* 說文解字, the earliest dictionary of Chinese characters compiled by the Eastern Han Dynasty scholar Xu Shen 許慎 (?58–149), the meaning of the character “*zhen*” is explained as “immortals transform and ascend to the Heaven”. The Qing Dynasty scholar Duan Yucai 段玉裁 commented: “This is the original meaning of ‘*zhen*’” (Duan 1981: 407). However, it is questionable that the original meaning of “*zhen*” is really about immortals transforming and ascending to Heaven, which is obviously a belief of the later Daoist religion. Xu Shen lived in the time of the Eastern Han Dynasty when religious Daoism had become very popular. Therefore, it is understandable that his explanation of this character was influenced by the prevailing Daoist religious belief of his time. But this explanation may not be an appropriate interpretation of the meaning of “*zhen*” as it appeared in the *Zhuangzi*. In Zhuangzi’s time, religious Daoism had not been formed yet, and in the *Zhuangzi*, no evident materials can support that Zhuangzi advocates a kind of religious practice for immortality, as practiced by the later religious Daoist believers.

Nevertheless, Xu Shen’s explanation of “*zhen*” suggests that there may be some primordial relation between “*zhen*” and Heaven, and this relation constitutes one of the multiple meanings of “*zhen*” as it appears in the *Zhuangzi*. It is in the *Zhuangzi* that this character has been used so frequently for the first time. We can hardly trace back the evolution of “*zhen*” in any texts earlier than the *Zhuangzi*. However, in the newly discovered Guodian Bamboo slips version of *Laozi*, we find that the character “*zhen* 真” which appears in the received version of *Laozi* is replaced by another character “*zhen* 貞” in two places (Jingmen Museum 1998: 8, 118). This provides a clue indicating a certain relation between these two characters. Actually they have the same pronunciation and have some resemblance in their forms. The original meaning of “*zhen* 貞” is divination. It is probably the most frequently used word in the earliest batch of ancient Chinese texts, i.e., the oracle bone inscriptions. The later extended meanings of “*zhen* 貞” include correctness, reliability in virtue, etc., which are synonymous to a certain degree with some extended meanings of the character “*zhen* 真”. If the relation between these two characters can be further proved, then “*zhen* 真” may really have an original semantic meaning linked to divinity or Heaven.

Even without this possible divine origin, the *Zhuangzi* itself still provides some evidence indicating that there are certain transcendental, divine or Heavenly attributes of Zhuangzi’s concept of “*zhen*”. As pointed out by some scholars, this concept in the *Zhuangzi* is closely related to “*tian* 天,” which literally refers to Heaven (Chong 2011: 325). For instance, in Chap. 31 (*The Fisherman*), the relation between “*zhen*” and “*tian*” has been clearly expressed in a dialogue between Confucius and the “fisherman,” who is obviously a spokesman of the author. In the dialogue the fisherman said: “*Zhen* is something that is received from the *tian* (Heaven), it is just



natural and cannot be changed. Therefore, the sages follow the pattern of *tian* and prize the value of *zhen*" (Guo 1982: 1032).<sup>2</sup>

However, the meaning of the concept "*tian*" in ancient Chinese philosophy is also very complicated. It does connote a certain meaning of divinity, especially in the earliest Confucian classics, such as the *Yi Jing* (*the Book of Change*), *Shang Shu* (*the Book of Documents*), and the *Shi Jing* (*The Book of Songs*). That is one of the reasons why the earliest Western missionary translators sometimes simply translate "*tian*" as "God". But at the same time "*tian*" also has some other connotations such as "nature," "inborn," "inartificial," "crude," etc. Therefore, we cannot judge an ancient Chinese thinker's thought to be theistic or not just depending on whether he emphasized the status of "*tian*" or not without further exploring the concrete implication of "*tian*" in his doctrine. The significances of "*tian*" in pre-Qin scholars' theories are varied. For instance, Mozi emphasizes the divinity aspects of "*tian*," because he believes that "*tian*" has its will and can execute reward and punishment on human behavior, while Xunzi considers "*tian*" mainly as natural phenomena without any intention and purpose. But in the thoughts of other scholars, such as Confucius and Mencius, the meaning of "*tian*" is ambiguous and unclear. For instance, when Confucius said: "If I have done anything improper, may *tian*'s curse be on me, may *tian*'s curse be on me!" (*Analects*, 6:28, Lau 1983: 54–55), this "*tian*" (Heaven) here seems to be a divine person who has Its likes and dislikes, as well as the power to punish people. But Confucius also said: "What does *tian* ever say? Yet there are the four seasons going round and there are the hundred things coming into being. What does *tian* ever say?" (*Analects*, 17:19, Lau 1983: 176–177). Here the "*tian*" seems to be no different than the natural process of the changing of the four seasons and the natural growth of things. In the case of the *Zhuangzi*, the situation is quite similar. The "*tian*" in the *Zhuangzi* has an obvious characteristic of "nature" or "naturalness," yet we cannot absolutely exclude the divinity attributes of "*tian*" in the *Zhuangzi*. It seems that to Zhuangzi, these two aspects do not contradict each other, being "nature" and being "super-nature" can be integrated together. Since "*zhen*" is closely related to the concept of "*tian*," its connotation also contains both the aspect of naturalness, spontaneousness, and the aspect of transcendency, supernaturalness and divinity. So we need to discuss the nuances of its meaning in different contexts.

"*Zhen*" refers to something that cannot be changed by human efforts. No matter whether you like it or not, or whether you recognize it or not, it is still there. That is the "*zhen*." So in chapter 2 (*Qi Wu Lun*), when discussing whether there is a "*zhen jun* (true lord)" in the human body, Zhuangzi says: "Whether you have discovered its situation or not, the '*zhen*' of it can never be reduced or increased." (Guo 1982: 56) This indicates that "*zhen*" represents the absolute truthfulness. Probably it is just in this sense, the "*zhen*" (true) has a link to the divination "*zhen* 貞," because it is by

<sup>2</sup>The citations of *Zhuangzi* in this chapter is based on its original Chinese version in Guo Qingfan's *Collected Commentaries on the Zhuangzi* 莊子集釋 (Guo 1982). The English translations are mainly done by myself, sometimes with reference to some of the prevailing English versions of *Zhuangzi* translated by Burton Watson (2013), A.C. Graham (1989), Victor Mair (1994), etc.

divination that people want to find the absolute “truthfulness” beyond their own cognitive competence.

“*Zhen*” means nature or naturalness, being “*zhen*” means conforming to the natural process, including life and death. Zhuangzi even calls death as “returning to the *zhen*” (Guo 1982: 266). From the perspective of Dao, death is just a part of the natural process of life, so death means no more than returning to nature. “*Zhen*” also refers to the inborn natural properties of things, for instance, chapter 9 (*Horses’ Hooves*) says that the horses are inborn with hooves to tread on frost and snow, with fur to withstand the wind and cold, they naturally feed on the grass and drink the water, prance with their legs and gallop on the land, and these are their “*zhen xing*” or true nature (Guo 1982: 330). In contrast, haltering and saddling the horses are considered as against “*zhen*,” because that is not the nature of the horses.

Similarly, for the human being, “*zhen*” means the natural instinct in the human body. In chapter 20 (*The Mountain Trees*), Zhuangzi tells an allegorical story. Once Zhuangzi was wandering in a garden, allured by greed of gaining and intending to catch an extraordinarily beautiful bird who was absorbedly aiming at a mantis. And that mantis was itself absorbed in stalking a cicada. At that moment Zhuangzi was not aware that he himself was also a target of the Garden Keeper, just like the bird and mantis were absorbed by the prey in front and totally unaware of the danger behind them. After Zhuangzi barely escaped from the Garden Keeper, he self-reflected for three days and realized that he had for a moment “forgotten the *zhen* when there is a lure of benefit in front of him”. Here the “*zhen*” means the natural instinct such as visual and auditory senses. The implication of this story is that, the natural instincts, or the “*zhen*” of life, can be blunted by greed for gain, extravagant desires, tricks for competition and striving, etc. These are all considered betraying the truthfulness (*zhen*) of life.

Therefore, “*zhen*” also refers to a plain, simple, primitive, and even crude way of life, without luxurious enjoyment, without any desires for wealth, prestige, power and social status, just as the way of life lived by some reclusive model figures described in Chapter 28 of the *Zhuangzi* (Guo 1982: 972–982). They all lived a simplistic, unadorned, humble, and impoverished life, yet they felt self-sufficient. This is because Daoism believes that only the simplistic and primitive life itself is the true life, other things outside of their life-body are all superfluous, unnecessary, and do not belong to the true life. Therefore, returning to “*zhen*” means recovering the original simplicity.

“*Zhen*” is opposite to anything artificially created by men. For instance, when Bo Le, the famous horsebreaker began to bridle the horses and trained them with whip and switch, the horses thereby lost their “*zhen*.” Similarly, when carpenters use wood to create furniture, and potters use clay to create wares, the wood and clay will have lost their “*zhen*” (Guo 1982: 330). In this sense, “*zhen*” also contrasts with the concept of “*wei* 偽,” which originally means “man-made,” “artificial,” but with later extended meanings of fictitious, contrived, fake, forged and even hypocritical.

“*Zhen*” also has a semantic orientation of being against well-established conventions and customs, indicating that these conventions, socially constructed customs, regulations or norms are contrived and fabricated. Therefore, being “*zhen*” means

not being restricted by these things. For instance, in a story recorded in chapter 21 (*Tian Zi Fang*), when the Lord Yuan of Song State called a group of court artists to come and paint pictures, most of them came early and waited. When they met the Lord they all behaved courteously according to the rites, and then went to prepare their brushes and inks according to the routine. Finally, an artist who came very late walked in idly, and when he met the Lord he didn't even complete the rite, instead going directly to his room. When the Lord sent someone to take a look, he was found naked in his room in a very unconventional way. The Lord then said: "Right! This one is the true (*zhen*) artist!" (Guo 1982: 718) This artist was considered "*zhen*" because he was unconventional. In other words, Zhuangzi thinks that all the conventions and rites etc., are just unnecessary disguise which may veil the truthfulness (*zhen*). So in chapter 30, it is said that: "the sages follow the pattern of *tian* and prize the value of *zhen*, hence they are not restricted by conventions." (Guo 1982: 1032)

"*Zhen*" also has a semantic indication of purity and sincerity, without any pretending and concealing. In the dialogue between Confucius and the fisherman recorded in chapter 30, Confucius asks: "What can be called '*zhen*'?" The Fisherman answered: "*Zhen* means utmost purity and sincerity, without purity and sincerity, you can never move others." Then the fisherman illustrated with the examples of those who pretend to be lamenting but cannot awaken any grief even when they force themselves to cry loudly, those who pretend to be angry but will arouse no awe even when they forced themselves to speak fiercely. This is because these people have no "*zhen*" inside (Guo 1982: 1032).

Above all, "*Zhen*" is closely related to the transcendental concepts such as "*tian*" (Heaven), Dao, the "spirit of Heaven and Earth," etc. This indicates that there is an obvious transcendental dimension of "*zhen*". At the beginning of the last chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, entitled *Tian Xia (The World)*, three most supreme personalities are mentioned: "Those who are not detached from the origin (*zong* 宗), are called Heavenly men; those who are not detached from quintessence (*jing* 精), are called divine men; those who are not detached from *zhen*, are called perfect men." (Guo 1982: 1066) These personalities are obviously not the ordinary people living in this world, they represent a certain transcendence and divinity, and "*zhen*" together with origin (*zong* 宗) and quintessence (*jing* 精) represent the transcendental ultimate resource of human spirit. So we can say that in general, "*zhen*" represents a transcendental orientation, which is specifically demonstrated in yearning for natural, simplistic, unconstrained, unconventional life, and pursuing a unity with "*tian*" (Heaven) and the ultimate Dao.

The transcendental orientation was very common in the thoughts of the thinkers of the "axial period." In Pre-Qin Confucianism, we can also find a certain transcendental dimension. Although the character "*zhen*" does not appear in early Confucian classics, another word "*cheng* 誠," which was discussed in *Zhong Yong (The Doctrine of the Mean)*, *Mencius* and *Xunzi*, may represent a similar transcendental orientation. "*Cheng* 誠" literally means honesty and sincerity. But according to *Zhong Yong*, the significance of "*cheng*" is much more than just a kind of human virtue of honesty and sincerity. "*Cheng*" is the "Way of Heaven" ("誠者天之道也"), "without *Cheng*, nothing exists" ("不誠無物"), "the supreme *cheng* is like Gods"

(“至誠如神”). All of these indicate that both Confucian “*cheng*” and Zhuangzi’s “*zhen*” have some transcendental significance. In other words, both pre-Qin Confucianism and Daoism have a kind of transcendental or metaphysical dimensions.

According to the basic teachings of Confucianism, even though there may be some unusual sages who were born with knowledge and wisdom, the majority of people in the world must receive the education of Confucian moral doctrines, be illuminated by the teaching of those who have been enlightened in advance, and learn how to behave in society according to the Confucian rituals. Therefore Confucianism emphasizes the importance of social conventions and moral standards, calling people to prudently obey the norms and rules of the society, to conduct self-cultivation through learning and daily moral practice, in order to become a “*junzi* 君子” or superior man in society. Confucianism believes this is just the way for individuals to fulfil their “Heavenly Mandate” and eventually arrive at the transcendental realm.

However, Zhuangzi’s approach towards the transcendent is quite different from that of Confucianism. Obviously, Zhuangzi’s discourse of “*zhen*” and its relative concepts such as “*zhen ren*” (true person), “*zhen zhi* (true knowledge) etc., can only be understood appropriately under the context of criticizing Confucianism. According to Zhuangzi, all the Confucian moral doctrines including “*ren* 仁” (benevolence) and “*yi* 義” (righteousness or justice), and all the Confucian ethical codes of conduct, social protocols, conventions and customs represented by the “*li* 禮” (rites or rituals), have been artificially created by the Confucian “Sages” rather than generated from the naturalness of the Dao. Therefore, they are all against the true nature of human being, just like the horse bridles and saddles which have been artificially enforced on horses against the natural inclinations of the horses. Zhuangzi even compares the Confucian moral doctrines to chains and shackles used to constrain criminals, and calls it the “internal penalty” which has been enforced on human spirit by the so-called “Sages”. In Zhuangzi’s view, in order to realize the true transcendental goal, men must get rid of all these artificially fabricated moral shackles and conventional constraints, break through the restrictions of socially constructed knowledge systems and values, return to the naturalness of Dao, and recover the Heavenly born truthfulness (*zhen*) of life.

Zhuangzi’s ideal towards the transcendental “*zhen*” is further demonstrated in his concepts of “*zhen ren*” (true person) and “*zhen zhi*” (true knowledge), as we will discuss in the following sections.

### 3 *Zhen ren* (True Person): The Daoist Ideal Personality

In the *Zhuangzi*, several terms for excellent or ideal personalities are frequently mentioned, such as “*xian ren* 賢人” (talent or worth person), “*sheng ren* 聖人” (sage or wise person), “*zhi ren* 至人” (perfect person), “*zhen ren* 真人” (true person), “*shen ren* 神人” (divine person), etc. Among these personalities, “*sheng ren* 聖人” (sage) is the most frequently mentioned. Actually “*sheng ren*” is a common

ideal personality appearing in many pre-Qin scholars' works, especially in Confucian texts. It usually refers to those ancient sage kings, political leaders with merit, as well as some very wise persons in human society. In Confucian discourse, "*sheng ren*" is the highest ideal personality. The goal of Confucian moral education is that, first let people become a "*jun zi*" (superior man) in society, and then let them eventually walk towards the realm of "*sheng ren*" or the Sagelihood.

Although the "*sheng ren*" in the *Zhuangzi* are different from the "*sheng ren*" in the Confucian classics in that they have some Daoist characteristics, they still can be identified with the Confucian "*sheng ren*" in a certain sense, for they are usually very wise, clever, talented and competent, etc. However, in the *Zhuangzi*, "*sheng ren*" cannot be considered the highest ideal personality. They are only human beings without any supernatural properties, and they will die. Sometimes in the *Zhuangzi*, "*sheng ren*" is the object of criticism, especially in chapter 9 (*Horses' Hooves*) and chapter 10 (*Cutting Open Coffers*), in which these sages (*sheng ren*) are criticized for having destroyed the simplicity and naturalness of human nature with their moral doctrines of "*ren* 仁" and "*yi* 義," thus ruining the Dao (Guo 1982: 341). They are also accused for bringing little benefit but much harm to the world. The author of chapter 9 even indicates that the world would be peaceful and free from theft and robbery only when all the sages are dead. Obviously, "*sheng ren*" (sage) is not a typical Daoist ideal personality in the *Zhuangzi*, although in some chapters, the image of "*sheng ren*" is positive and has been praised.

In the *Zhuangzi*, the hierarchy of personalities from low to high is successively from "*xiao ren* 小人" (trivial man), to "*jun zi* 君子" (gentleman), "*xian ren* 賢人" (talent or worthy person), till "*sheng ren* 聖人" (sage or wise person), and then above, there are still "*zhi ren* 至人" (perfect person), "*zhen ren* 真人" (true person), "*shen ren* 神人" (deity person). Through careful reading of the texts containing these terms we may find that only the last three can be considered as representing the typical Daoist ideal personality. They all care little about social, political or secular affairs, they do not mind personal gains or losses; they can wander freely and unfettered in the world, and most importantly, they all have a certain degree of supernatural attributes not possessed by any of the other personalities. So we can say that these three are typically Daoist ideal personalities. However, among these three, the "*shen ren* 神人" (deity person) is at the highest level but is almost unhuman, and is far beyond the reach of any human being. As described in chapter 1 (*Free and Easy Wandering*), these deity or spirit-like persons "never eat the grain foods but only suck the wind and drink the dew, they ride on the clouds and drive the flying dragons, wandering beyond the four seas. They can even use their concentrated spirit to protect everything from sickness and guarantee a plentiful harvest." (Guo 1982: 28) Obviously, these deity persons do not belong to this world and they are beyond human beings' capacity of attainment.

"*Zhen ren*" and "*zhi ren* 至人" (perfect person) share with each other many common attributes and can be identified with each other. Actually, in chapter 13 (*The Heavenly Dao*), Laozi is quoted saying that the *zhi ren* can "probe thoroughly to the zhen of things and stick to the root (極物之真, 能守其本)". In chapter 33 (*The World*), it is said that "those who do not detach from *zhen*, are called *zhi ren* (不離

於真，謂之至人” (Guo 1982: 1066). This indicates that “*zhi ren*” is also closely related to the concept “*zhen*.” Therefore, “*Zhen ren*” and “*zhi ren*” can be considered the highest level of personality that human beings can reach in the Daoist doctrines.

In the *Zhuangzi*, the term “*zhen ren*” appears 17 times, mainly in chapter 6 (*The Great Authentic Master*), chapter 15 (*Ingrained Intentions*), chapter 21 (*Tian Zi Fang*), and chapter 32 (*Lie Yukou*). The longest paragraph about “*zhen ren*” appears in chapter 6, which describes the image of the “*zhen ren*” in detail:

There must be a *zhen ren* (true person) before there can be any *zhen zhi* (true knowledge). Then, what does it mean to be a *zhen ren*? The *zhen ren* in ancient times did not go against being needy, did not boast of their achievement, did not scheme. A man like this would neither regret for what they had missed, nor be self-complacent with what they had luckily chanced upon. A man like this would not tremble when climbing to a height, would not get wet when diving deep in water, would not be heated when getting into fire. Only those whose knowledge has ascended to the level of Dao can be like this.

The *zhen ren* in ancient times never dream when they slept, had no anxiety when they awoke. They ate but were indifferent about the deliciousness, their breathing was very deep, the *zhen ren*'s breathing came deep from his heels, while other people's breathing comes shallow from their throats. (This is because) When one's body is crouching, his speech will be oppressed; when one is indulged deeply in lust and desire, his heavenly flexibility will be shallow.

The *zhen ren* in ancient times did not know that life is enjoyable and death is disgusting, they would neither expect a birth nor resist a death. They just went back relaxedly and came out casually. They did not forget where they were originally from, they did not care where they would eventually end. They accepted whatever comes delightfully; they forgot it as it was restored. This is called do not resist the Dao with mind, do not assist the Heaven with the human. This is what can be called the *zhen ren*. A man being in such case, his mind is in the clouds, his appearance is easy and calm, his forehead is broad and bright. His coldness is like autumn, his warmth is like spring. His joy and anger are in accordance with the four seasons, and he is compatible with anything and no one knows the limitation of his capacity....<sup>3</sup>

The *zhen ren* in ancient times had a majestic appearance yet without arrogance, seemed insufficient yet without flattery and cringing. They behaved independently and alone, but were not bigoted. They were broad and empty in mind but without ostentation. They looked satisfied as if they were really happy, moved nimbly as if they just could not stop it. Pondering in heart yet burnishing my complexion, being agreeable yet adhere to my virtue, being stern yet still sociable and worldly. They were lofty thus cannot be controlled, they were reticent and tending to seclude, they were casual as if forgetting what to speak....<sup>4</sup> So there was always an ‘oneness’ whether they like it or dislike it. Their ‘one’ belongs to the ‘oneness’, their ‘not one’ also belongs to the ‘oneness’. Their ‘one’ is following the Heaven;

<sup>3</sup> Here a paragraph of 101 characters in the original text of the current version of *Zhuangzi* has long been suspected by scholars as misplaced bamboo slips which may belong to other chapters, or even belong to other books, thus has been omitted (Chen 1983: 172; Cui 2012: 214).

<sup>4</sup> Here a paragraph of 72 characters from the original text in the current version has been omitted, since it has also been pointed out by some scholars as misplaced text which is inconsistent with the context (Chen 1983: 175–176).



their 'not one' is following the human. Heaven and human are not rivalling each other for a victory. Such were those who are called the *zhen ren*. (Guo 1982: 226–235)

Another important paragraph concerning the concept of “*zhen ren*” is in chapter 21 (*Tian Zi Fang*). Here, Confucius is quoted as giving a comment on a dialogue between Jian Wu and Shusun Ao. In his comment, this Confucius with a Daoist tendency obviously used the term of “*zhen ren*” to praise Shusun Ao, who had been appointed as the prime minister of Chu state and then dismissed from the same position three times during his life time, yet he never showed any delight or sorrow during the dramatic ups and downs in his life. Confucius is depicted as saying:

A *zhen ren* in ancient times could not be persuaded by clever persons, could not be seduced by beauties, and could not be hijacked by robbers. Even the Emperor Fuxi and the Yellow emperor could not make friend with him. Life and death are indeed big events, yet they could not make any change on his mind, how much less could he care about positions and salaries. Being such a person, his spirit could pass through the Mountain Tai unobstructed, he could dive in deep abyss without being soaked, and he could stay in the most menial and humble position without being distressed. His spirit fills the heaven and the earth, the more he gives to others the more he possesses. (Guo 1982: 727)

In chapter 15 (*Ingrained Intentions*), the author indicates that a “*zhen ren*” should have a characteristic of simplicity and purity. “The simplicity means there is nothing adulterated in it, the purity means the spirit has not been impaired. Those who embody the simplicity and purity can be called a *zhen ren*” (Guo 1982: 546). In chapter 32 (*Lie Yu Kou*), the “*zhen ren*” is described as being able to be immune from both external and internal punishments. “The external punishment is executed with metal and wood instruments; the internal punishment is caused by motives and regrets. When the trivial men are suffering the external punishment, their body will be tortured by wood and metal instruments; when they were suffering internal punishment, their heart will eroded by the struggle between *yin* and *yang*. Only a *zhen ren* can be immunized from both external and internal punishments.” (Guo 1982: 1053).

The term “*zhi ren* 至人” has also been used many times in different chapters in the *Zhuangzi*. Although it has not been intensively discussed as “*zhen ren*” has been discussed in certain chapters, we can still summarize its main characteristics from the scattered usage of this term according to the contexts. In general, “*zhi ren*” shares most of the attributes with “*zhen ren*”. For instance, they also have the ability of “diving underwater without being suffocated, treading on fire without being heated, walking above everything without trembling.” (Guo 1982: 633) *Zhi ren* “would not feel the heat when the mountain forest was on fire, would not feel cold when the rivers were frozen, even the thunderbolt that cracks the mountains or the hurricane tsunami that shocks the oceans could not scare them,” and they are imperious to life and death, indifferent about advantages and disadvantages (Guo 1982: 96). They consider social prestige as a kind of shackles (Guo 1982: 204). The *zhi ren* “share the food with people on earth but share the joy with heaven, never being disturbed by worldly advantages or disadvantages from people and things. They do not join others in doing odd things, they do not make schemes with others, they do not engage in affairs with others. They just come and go casually and freely” (Guo



1982: 96). A *zhi ren* “uses his mind like a mirror, neither detaining nor welcoming anything, just reflecting whatever comes without storing them” (Guo 1982: 307).

In general, “*zhen ren*” and “*zhi ren*” can be identified as the same Daoist ideal personality in the *Zhuangzi*. They can be considered the personalization of the basic Daoist ideas and doctrines, such as conforming to the Dao and nature, being *wu wei* 無為 (doing nothing) and reconciled to the naturalness of life, being indifferent to secular fame and wealth, wandering in the world casually and indifferently, keeping a peaceful and tranquil mind and caring little about gain or loss, advantage or disadvantage, success or failure, life and death, etc. They wander in the secular world but their spirits are lofty and transcendent, keeping a unity with the Heaven and the Dao. They are the embodiment of the Daoist doctrine and the Daoist way of life. To modern readers, the so called “*zhen ren*” or “*zhi ren*” seems impossible to be any individual who has ever lived in reality. But according to the *Zhuangzi*, this ideal personality is the highest level a man can reach through Daoist cultivation, following a quite different approach compared with Confucianism.

Modern readers may think that some of the supernatural characteristics, such as “never get wet when diving deep in water, never be heated when getting into fire” etc., which have been attributed to “*zhen ren*,” are impossible in reality. Therefore, they tend to understand these descriptions in the *Zhuangzi* only as metaphors which are just analogously indicating that a person with the ideal Daoist personality can calmly face any objective conditions or changes in the outside world without panic or fear. This interpretation of course is acceptable in the modern academic discourse. But we probably cannot exclude the possibility that, from the viewpoint of Zhuangzi and the people of the pre-Qin time, there might not be a clear boundary between what is “natural” and what is “supernatural”. They might perceive both “natural” and “supernatural” as the naturalness of Dao, and believed that if a man practiced the Daoist cultivation seriously, he might eventually comprehend the truth of the Dao and ascend to the level of becoming in unity with the Heaven and the Earth, as a result, he might indeed acquire those unbelievable abilities. Actually, at the end of the Warring States period and in the Qin Dynasty, the longevity and omnipotence of *zhen ren* had become a true belief and the life pursuit of some sorcerers and individuals. As recorded by Sima Qian in *Shi Ji* (史記), after being advised by a sorcerer name Lu Sheng about elixirs, longevity and *zhen ren*, Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of the unified China empire, was so longing to become a *zhen ren*, that he began to call himself “*zhen ren*” (Sima 2014: 328). After the rise of religious Daoism in the Han Dynasty, “*zhen ren*” has really become a kind of immortal in the religious Daoist belief. According to some later religious Daoist documents, *zhen ren*’s life is as long as that of the heaven and the earth, because *zhen ren* is totally unified with the Dao and the nature, so he has surpassed life and death, and he is also omnipotent. And Zhuangzi himself has also been awarded with the title of “the *zhen ren* of Nanhua (南華真人)” by Emperor Xuan Zong (reigned 712–756) of the Tang Dynasty. Afterwards, “*zhen ren*” became the highest title a Daoist master can acquire. Although we don’t think Zhuangzi’s thought is religious, it did provide some theoretic and literary resources for the later Daoist religion. It is

obvious that there is a link between Zhuangzi's concept of "*zhen ren*" and the "*zhen ren*" immortals in the later Daoist religion.

There are also some contemporary researchers who have interpreted "*zhen ren*" in terms of the Western philosophical framework, especially that of the modern or even post-modern Western philosophical theories. Someone has compared Zhuangzi's "*zhen ren*" to Nietzsche's "superman" (Shang 2007), others understand "*zhen ren*" in the sense of existentialist authenticity, which emphasizes the meaning of individualist autonomy and independence, or highlights the concept of "authentic self" contrasting to one's socially constructed roles. However, this kind of interpretation has also been criticized by others, who think that there is not a strong sense of "self," or a sense of unique "ownness" or "authorship" in Zhuangzi's concept of "*zhen ren*," therefore, it does not have the connotation of individualistic values contained in the Western existentialist concept of "authenticity" (D'Ambrosio 2015).

Zhuangzi's concept of "true person" or "perfect person" may not have the same connotations as those developed in the Western tradition of individualism, but it is questionable to claim that there is not a sense of "self" or "ownness" in the *Zhuangzi*, or there is no concern about individual autonomy and integrity in Zhuangzi's philosophy at all. It is true that in chapter 1 (*Xiao Yao You*), Zhuangzi says that a "perfect person has no self (至人无己)," but in other chapters he also says that a perfect person should "be compliant with others yet without losing his own self (順人而不失己)" (Guo 1982: 938), and he criticized that "those who have lost their own self in materials, and lost their nature in conventions should be called the upside down people (喪己於物, 失性於俗者, 謂之倒置之民)" (Guo 1982: 558). Therefore, it is not without reason for some scholars to distinguish the "original self" from the "socially constructed self" in texts of the *Zhuangzi* (Chen 2001). In my view, instead of having no sense of "self" and "individual" at all, Zhuangzi might have a different concept of "self" and "individual," and a different type of "individualism" compared to those developed in the Western tradition of individualism (Xu 2011). He does not view individuals as fixed and unchangeable atoms with certain inborn properties, rather, he considers them as dynamically various and changeable. Therefore, there may not be an absolute and fixed authenticity of self. The content of "self" is dynamic and the horizon of "self" has different levels. Entering the realm of "*zhen*" and becoming a "*zhen ren*" is the highest level of horizon an individual "self" can arrive at through Daoist cultivation.

At the same time, the ideal personality of "*zhen ren*" provides a different approach for self-development in contrast to that of the Confucian ideal personality of "*jun zi* 君子" which emphasizes the individual social roles and moral responsibilities based on conventions. Therefore, being a "*zhen ren*" in a certain sense means disregarding social norms and conventions, ignoring those commonly accepted moral standards and social constraints. It also means preserving one's integrity and protecting one's individuality from the control and impact of the tyrannical political authority and the corrupt social environment. As pointed out by Kim-Chong Chong, to be a "*zhen ren*" in some contexts of the *Zhuangzi* means maintaining a life free from corrupt socio-political hierarchical relationships, and refusing the attendant trappings of wealth, reputation, eminence, power, and so on, and it did involve a concern with

maintaining personal integrity (Chong 2011: 329). In ancient China, this has provided a leeway or a thinking space for those individuals, especially the intellectuals, who wanted to challenge the mainstream ideology, to rebel against orthodoxy, to keep their independence and to express their individual characters. So we can say that, in practice, the ideal of “*zhen ren*” did have some social functions similar to a certain kind of western individualism, albeit based on different theoretical logic and connotations.

#### 4 *Zhen zhi* (True Knowledge): In the Realm of Transcendent and Absolute Truthfulness

From the perspective of Western epistemology and the modern theory of knowledge, it is not difficult to see that Zhuangzi, similar to Laozi, has an apparent tendency of denying the value of ordinary or conventional knowledge, because both advocate the simplicity of “no knowledge, no desire (无知无欲),” and to “cut off intelligence and discard knowledge (絕聖棄知)”. However, Zhuangzi also created the term “*zhen zhi* 真知,” which literally means “true knowledge”. This seems to indicate that Zhuangzi thinks that the commonly accepted knowledge is not so “true (*zhen*),” and he is only skeptical about the truthfulness of that knowledge, rather than simply denying all knowledge. In order to understand the meaning of Zhuangzi’s concept of “*zhen zhi*,” we need to discuss first why Zhuangzi suspects the validity of ordinary knowledge, and how the so called “true knowledge” could be acquired.

Yang Guorong points out that Zhuangzi actually has distinguished two kinds of knowledge, i.e., the knowledge to explore the materials or things, which is limited to the empirical world; and the knowledge of comprehending the Dao, which is oriented to metaphysical wisdom (Yang 2006). Wang Yubing also points out that in the *Zhuangzi*, the object of knowledge has shifted from “material” to “Dao,” and the subject of knowledge has also shifted from sensory organs and intellects to “mind-spirit” (Wang 2016). Zhuangzi indeed has a boundary between two different “*zhi* (知)s”<sup>5</sup>: The “*zhi*” that belongs to the empirical or secular world, and the “*zhi*” that belongs to the metaphysical or transcendent realm. The former refers to the knowledge which ordinary people can learn and use in daily life, the latter points to a transcendent and mystical realm that can only be accessed by the so called “*zhen ren* (true person).” Zhuangzi tends to deny the value and validity of the first kind of knowledge. He has provided several arguments to question the legitimacy and reliability of the empirical and worldly knowledge.

Firstly, Zhuangzi thinks that everything as the object of knowledge in the world is dynamic and changing along with the permanently evolving Dao, so any established knowledge about things in the world can never be accurate. Zhuangzi says: “Knowledge can only be considered legitimate when it corresponds to its related

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<sup>5</sup> In ancient Chinese, the character “*zhi* (知)” has both the meaning of “knowledge” and “wisdom”.

object, but the related object is always uncertain” (Guo 1982: 224). Analogously, people believe they have knowledge about snakes and cicadas, but their knowledge actually can only be compared to the scales exuviated from the snakes or the wings shed from the cicadas, and can never truly represent living snakes or living cicadas. In other words, the uncertainty of the object of knowledge denies the certainty and legitimacy of any knowledge.

Secondly, the legitimacy of the cognitive subject in knowledge is also questionable. Zhuangzi asks: “If a man sleeps in a wetland, he would get lumbago and end up with half body paralysis, but is this true for a mud fish? If a man sleeps on a tree, he would be trembling and scared, but is this true for a monkey? Then, of these three, who legitimately knows the right place to sleep? Men eat the flesh of those livestock, elks eat grass, centipedes eat snakes, and owls find the corrupted mouse tasty. Then, of these four, who has the correct knowledge of the right taste?...” (Guo 1982: 93) From the perspective of the Dao, men and animals are equal; therefore men’s perception has no privilege over that of other animals. And this may also be understood as analogously indicating that even among human beings, perceptions also vary from one person to another, and there is no way to decide whose perception is legitimized to acquire the right knowledge.

Thirdly, Zhuangzi thinks that it is also questionable if people can deduce correct knowledge through arguments based on commonly accepted reasons. Zhuangzi says: “Suppose I am debating with you, you win and I lose, does that necessarily mean that you are right and I am wrong? If I win and you lose, does that necessarily mean that I am right and you are wrong? Must there be someone right and someone wrong among us? Or possibly both of us are right or both of us are wrong? Since you and I cannot mutually understand each other, others are surely all in darkness, whom shall we ask to make a final judgment? Ask someone who agrees with you? But if he has already agreed with you, how could he make a fair judgment? Ask someone who agrees with me? But if he has already agreed with me, how could he make a fair judgment? Ask someone who agrees with neither you nor me? But if he has already disagreed with either of us, how could he make a fair judgment? Ask someone who agrees with both you and me? But if he has already agreed with both of us, how could he make a fair judgment? Therefore, neither you nor me nor others can agree on a common knowledge, shall we still expect this of anyone else?” (Guo 1982: 107) Obviously, Zhuangzi thinks that debate and argument only represent the different stances and opinions of different cognitive subjects. There is no common ground of reason as a standard or rule from which people can deduce correct conclusions.

It seems that Zhuangzi basically denies there is any possibility to verify or prove the truthfulness of any worldly knowledge. In other words, there is no way for anyone to prove one’s current knowledge is the “true knowledge” in the empirical world. However, there may be different levels among these worldly knowledge based on its relative scope of applicability or validity in the secular world, since Zhuangzi has made a difference between the “small knowledge” and the “great knowledge,” and he thinks even the worldly knowledge can also reach its highest level of perfection. In chapter 1, Zhuangzi says: “Small knowledge does not reach

to great knowledge". This has been analogously illustrated by examples such as the cicada and the little dove who cannot understand why the big fish-bird monster Kun-Peng has to fly to the height of ninety thousand *li* and go to the south; a one day traveler does not have the consideration of those who are preparing for longer journeys; a morning mushroom has no idea of what is the beginning and the end of a whole month; a summer cicada never knows there is still spring and autumn, etc. This indicates that the valid degrees of knowledge depend on the living situation or existential state of the cognitive subjects. In chapter 17 (*Autumn Flood*), Zhuangzi also uses the dialogue between Lord of the River and God of the North Sea to indicate the different levels of knowledge. As the God of the North Sea says: "A frog in a well cannot understand the talk about the ocean, because he is limited in his narrow space; a summer insect cannot understand the talk about ice, because he is restricted by his time; with a biased scholar you cannot discuss about the Dao, because he has been brain washed by his education" (Guo 182: 562).

The different levels of knowledge are due to the space-time limitation of different cognitive subjects. People usually believe what they have known as the true knowledge, until one day when they have reached a new horizon and realized that what they had been convinced about before was not true, just like only when one is awake can one realize what has happened in the dream is not true. Therefore, what kind of knowledge one can obtain depends on one's level of being, i.e., what kind of person one is, and in what state one is living. A well frog's knowledge cannot surpass the boundary of its well, Lord of the River was able to break through his old knowledge only when he came to the north ocean, and a dreamer will be able to realize that it was a dream only when he awoke from that dream. Therefore, one's level of knowledge depends on one's level of existence.

Along with the lifting of one's level of existence, one's knowledge can be promoted. But since one can even have a dream within a dream, so no one knows if his current situation is truly awake or whether it is still in another bigger dream. Zhuangzi says in chapter 2: "When a man is dreaming, he does not know that it is a dream. He may even interpret a dream in his dream. Until he wakes he knows it was a dream. Only after the greatest awakening can we realize that we have been in a big dream. Yet the stupid think they were awake, and feel complacent with their self-conceived knowledge" (Guo 1982: 104–105). Zhuangzi even suggests that life itself may just be a dream, he asks: "How do I know that loving of life isn't just a kind of obsessiveness? How do I know that hating of death is not like a lost child who doesn't want go back home after growing up?...How do I know that the dead do not feel remorseful about their previous seeking for longer life?" (Guo 1982: 103). Therefore, according to Zhuangzi, all the worldly knowledge cannot be considered the "true knowledge," although some knowledge may be "greater" than others due to different levels or degrees of "awakening."

There is always a boundary between the worldly knowledge and the so called "true knowledge." That boundary is also the boundary between the human and Heaven. In chapter 6 Zhuangzi says: "knowing what it is that Heaven does, and knowing what it is that humans can do, that is perfect enough. Knowing what it is that Heaven does: Heaven gives life to everything. Knowing what it is that humans

can do: using what is known by intellect to nourish what is unknown by intellect, being able to complete the natural years of life rather than dying on the halfway, that is the zenith of the worldly knowledge.” (Guo 1982: 224). But this still cannot be considered the “true knowledge,” because there is still a division between the so called “Heaven” and the so called “human,” and no one can prove the accurateness of this division, as *Zhuangzi* says next: “How can I know that what I called ‘Heaven’ is not actually ‘human’, and what I called ‘human’ is not actually ‘Heaven’?” (Guo 1982: 225)

Consequently, if one really wants to acquire the “*zhen zhi*”, one must break through the boundary between Heaven and the human, ascend to the transcendent level of existence of “*zhen*,” in which the Heaven and human are in an indivisible unity, thus becoming a “*zhen ren*”. That is why *Zhuangzi* says: “There must first be the true person (*zhen ren*) before there can be any true knowledge (*zhen zhi*).”

Actually, according to *Zhuangzi*, being a “*zhen ren*” and having “*zhen zhi*” are inseparable, they are just the two sides of the same thing. This can also be considered a manifestation of the centuries-old tradition of “the unity of knowledge and action” in Chinese philosophy. The relation between “true person” and “true knowledge” can be analogically compared to the relation between “being a swimmer” and “knowing how to swim,” as indicated in chapter 19, and that between “being a skilled wheelwright” and “knowing how to chisel wheels,” as indicated in chapter 13. In chapter 19, Confucius met an unbelievable swimmer who could swim even better than fish and turtles in a huge waterfall. In answering Confucius’ question whether he had special knowledge of how to do it, he says: “No, I don’t know any special way, I just have come to be used to it since my very early life. It’s part of my nature and my life. I don’t know how it has been done yet I have done it.” (Guo 1982: 656–658) Here the knowledge of swimming has become part of the nature of the swimmer, the cognitive subject and the object of knowledge cannot be distinguished from each other. This swimmer can be considered having the “true knowledge” of swimming. Yet the “true knowledge” of swimming is so fully integrated with the swimmer himself that he even does not know that he has that knowledge. At the end of chapter 13 a skilled wheelwright named Bian satirizes the Duke Huan of Qi who was trying to learn the knowledge of governing from the books left behind by the ancient sage kings, indicating that the true knowledge of governing cannot be separated from the personal practice of governing of those sage kings, just like the wheelwright himself cannot impart the true knowledge of how to chisel the wheels to his own son. According to Wheelwright Bian, the book knowledge that can be imparted and taught is not so “true” and can only be compared to “dregs” (Guo 1982: 490–491).

As we have mentioned above, the concept “*zhen*” points to a transcendent realm, an ultimate existence in which the human and Heaven are in an absolute unity with Dao. So the “*zhen zhi*” may not only mean the concrete knowledge concerning swimming, wheel making or even state governing. Yet there is an analogical similarity. Only the men who have reached the realm of “*zhen*” will become “*zhen ren*,” and only those “*zhen ren*” can acquire the “*zhen zhi*.” Here, being the kind of person,



doing what the person is supposed to do, and having the knowledge of how to do it, are all identical in one inseparable “unity.”

Then, is it possible for a “*zhen ren*” to express the “*zhen zhi*” in language, transfer it into a general “truth” and then teach it to others? Unfortunately, according to Zhuangzi, this seems impossible. Because “*zhen*” means the absolute identity with Dao in the only “one,” but if it can still be described in language, it will not be the only “one.” In other words, when the “*zhen ren*” acquires the “true knowledge,” he can neither express it in language, nor impart it to others. That is why Zhuangzi says: “Those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know.” (Guo 1982: 489, 731)

In chapter 22 (*Knowledge Wanders North*), “Knowledge” (*zhi*) has been anthropomorphized as a figure and he raises three questions: “Through what process of thinking and consideration can we get to know the Dao? In what manner and behavior can we be comfortable with Dao? By what approach and method can we access the Dao?” The person called “Knowledge” poses these questions to “Dumb Noaction,” “Mad Stammerer”<sup>6</sup> and the Yellow Emperor, one after another. To these questions, the Dumb Noaction’s response is not to answer. He not only does not answer, but also actually does not know how to answer. The Mad Stammerer’s response is: “Ok, I know it. I will tell you shortly.” But just when he was about to say something, he totally forgot what to say. Finally, “Knowledge” poses the three questions to the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor answers: “Only without thinking and without consideration can you get to know the Dao. Only in no manner and no behavior can you be comfortable with the Dao. Only without approach and without method can you access the Dao.” Then, who among the three has the true knowledge? Finally, the Yellow Emperor confesses to “Knowledge”: “That Dumb Noaction is truly the man (who has the true knowledge), the Mad Stammerer is only seemingly so. But you and I are far away from it.” This is because “those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know.” (Guo 1982: 729–731) In other words, the “true knowledge” is equal to “not knowing” and “nothing to speak”.

Another fable in the same chapter also describes the situation of being in “true knowledge”: Gnaw Gap asks Wearcoat about the knowledge of Dao, Wearcoat instructs Gnaw Gap to rectify his body, focus his vision, restrain his perception, and unify his thinking, in order to wait for the arrival of the “heavenly harmony” and the “Spirit”. Gnaw Gap is thus hypnotized into a deep sleep even before Wearcoat has finished his words. Then Wearcoat happily says in praise: “Now, his body is like a dried skeleton, his mind is like dead ashes, he has truly acquired the substantial knowledge, and he is not self-righteous with what he knows before.” (Guo 1982: 566). Therefore, the state of being in “*zhen zhi*” is not only equal to not knowing and not speaking, but also similar to the situation of being sunk in deep sleep.

It seems paradoxical to claim that the “true knowledge” is just equal to being “without knowing,” and cannot be expressed in language. But we should recognize that the so called “true knowledge (*zhen zhi*)” in the *Zhuangzi* is not about true

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<sup>6</sup>Here the translated names of these figures in this chapter are borrowed from Mair (1994).



propositions in the sense of the correspondence theory of truth. Instead, it refers to a state of truthfulness in the transcendent and ultimate realm in which the Heaven and human, the subject and the object, ideas and materials, language and the world, etc., are all in an isomorphic unity. In this regard, we may understand that distinguishing between the subject which knows and the object which is known, or between what says and what is said, would be unnecessary and impossible. Because everything here is manifesting itself in its unshaded clarity, therefore, only this state can be considered the absolute and ultimate “*zhen* (true)” or truthfulness, which has transcended the bounds of what can be described by language, and entered into the realm of true unity of Heaven and the human.

## 5 Conclusion

In the *Zhuangzi*, the concept “*zhen* (true)” has a distinct transcendent dimension which links it closely to the highest philosophical categories such as “Heaven,” “Dao,” “Nature,” “the Spirit of heaven and earth,” etc.. “*Zhen ren* (true person)” represents the highest level of ideal personality that can be achieved by human beings through Daoist cultivation. “*Zhen zhi* (true knowledge)” implies the ultimate metaphysical knowledge and wisdom in Daoism. To be a “*zhen ren*” and thus to obtain the “*zhen zhi*” means being absolutely identical with the natural Dao, and ascending to the transcendental realm of “Heaven and human in unity”. The concrete meaning of being a “*zhen ren*” and having “*zhen zhi*” is consistent with the basic Daoist doctrines, such as obeying the naturalness of Dao; “*wu wei* (no action);” returning to simplicity and the origin; not being clever and having no desires; being indifferent to secular gains and losses, fame and wealth, life and death; despising political authority and social conventions, etc.

Under the academic background of Warring States scholarship, the Zhuangzian “true person” and “true knowledge” obviously point to a different kind of ideal personality, different type of individual life, and understanding of knowledge and wisdom, all in contrast to those of the other prevailing schools, notably Confucianism. Being a “true person” and obtaining “true knowledge” present an attitude of overturning the accepted social norms of behavior, challenging the established social conventions and protocols, and pursuing a transcendent and lofty state of spirituality. In practice and reality, this attitude did provide a leeway for those individuals who wanted to maintain an individual life free from social constraints and preserve their personal independence and integrity.

The notion of “*zhen*” in the *Zhuangzi* is closely related to the Heavenly Dao and represents one of the important attributes of the Dao. And the “Dao” in Daoism is actually infinity, boundlessness, permanent yet ever moving, and indefinable by language. Therefore, “*zhen*” in the *Zhuangzi* also leads to an open horizon without boundary and limitation. Being a “true person” means being totally identical with that boundless realm of the natural Dao and the “spirit of Heaven and earth,” conforming to only the Dao rather than any social political authority. Accordingly,

obtaining “*zhen zhi*” also means entering a boundless open realm and being together with Dao, rather than accepting a set of theoretical “truth” presented as a series of propositions. In the long history of ancient China, this orientation represented by the Zhuangzian “true person” and “true knowledge” has a cultural function of breaking through the mainstream social conventions and constraints, and provides a free space for the development of individual characteristics.

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# Chapter 9

## Zhuangzi on No-Emotion



David Chai

### 1 Introduction

One of the most endearing qualities of any sentient being is its propensity to display emotion. In the case of human beings, what emotion entails and where emotion comes from has been a perennial question for philosophers and theologians since antiquity. Indeed, we can find one of the clearest explanations on the nature of emotion in Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric*: "The emotions are all those affections which cause men to change their opinion in regard to their judgements and are accompanied by pleasure and pain; such are anger, pity, fear and all similar emotions and their contraries" (Aristotle 1959: 173). Besides philosophy and religion, the source of this causality would also come to be sought in the fields of literature, medicine, and, more recently, psychology. What these five disciplines have in common is that they all attempt to answer two primary questions: Who has emotion? and Where is emotion located? The first question more often than not results in a distinction between humans and animals, while the second probes the relationship between the internal source of emotion and its resultant external manifestation. To complicate the matter even more, when dealing with ancient China, there is not even a consensus on the meaning of the word typically taken to mean emotion (*qing* 情)—it is

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K.-c. Chong (ed.), *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi*, Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy 16,

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92331-0\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92331-0_9)

variously understood as feeling, desire, and passion<sup>1</sup>—while also meaning the state, facts, or condition of a thing.

The objective of this chapter is not to engage the ongoing debate over how to interpret the Chinese word *qing*; rather, it will offer an exploratory reading of passages from the *Zhuangzi* that provide an expository view of the text's attitude towards human emotion and why our dependency on it serves as a barrier to attaining oneness with the Dao 道. Indeed, Zhuangzi famously argued that while the sage has human form, he does not rely on human emotions to know the world and is thus said to be without emotion (*wuqing* 無情). This portrayal of the sage has led some scholars to compare him with Stoicism, others to describe his condition as a loss of self-agency, while beyond them, there are those who interpret *qing* as a metaphysical constancy inherent to all living things in the world. These might very well be true, at least partially, but they say nothing of why Zhuangzi railed against our overt dependency on sensory experience or emotional interpretation when it comes to knowing and perfecting our inborn nature. The Daoist project is about self-completion through self-emptying, of transcending the greatest obstacles facing us in life by using what is already at hand. To claim, as Zhuangzi does, that we should follow the sage's example and be without emotion—to embrace the non-emotion of the Dao—is to break the chains of emotional bondage so as to wander in all that is untouched by debates over the properness of individual feelings and emotional rationalizations. In other words, when the sage abides by the life-giving principle of the Dao, he partakes in its life-giving emotion; however, as the Dao is formless, silent, and empty, this life-giving emotion is rendered as non-emotion, which is why the sage is described as being without emotion.

## 2 The Corruptive Power of Emotion

Before commencing our examination of the *Zhuangzi*'s doctrine of no-emotion, we would be well served by explaining how it is used in Laozi's *Daodejing*. Immediately, however, we face a conceptual problem. The word *qing* does not appear in the *Daodejing* (it appears sixty-one times in the *Zhuangzi*); instead, what we have is desire (*yu* 欲), which occurs twenty-six times, while the phrase no-desire (*wuyu* 無欲) appears in only five instances.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the *Zhuangzi* uses the phrase

<sup>1</sup>For a more detailed picture of the debate surrounding how to interpret *qing* in pre-Han Chinese philosophy, see the respective works of Graham (1990), Hansen (1995), Bruya (2001), Puett (2004), Harbsmeier (2004), Fraser (2011), Machek (2015), and Marks and Ames (1995). Of these, Bruya offers a strong rebuttal of Graham's reading of *qing* in the *Zhuangzi*, Fraser aligns *qing* with human agency and does not explore it as a philosophical concept in its own right, while Machek portrays *qing* as a natural self-emerging that is comparable to the involuntary self-emergence of Stoicism.

<sup>2</sup>No-desire occurs in *Daodejing* chapter 1: "Thus always be without desire to observe its [Dao] marvelousness; always have desire to see its ends 故常無欲，以觀其妙；常有欲，以觀其微；" chapter 3: "Always keep the common people ignorant and without desire 常使民無知無欲；" chap-

no-desire<sup>3</sup> only three times and, perhaps coincidentally, no-emotion is used five times. This is remarkable considering *yu* is used just over one-hundred times in the *Zhuangzi*. What is more, chapter 23 (*gengsang chu* 庚桑楚) lists four ways our inborn nature can be corrupted—impulses of the will (*bo zhi* 勃志), errors of the heart-mind (*miu xin* 繆心), entangled virtue (*lei de* 累德), and obstructing the Dao (*sai dao* 塞道). Each of these, in turn, contain six emotions (*wu* 惡, *yu* 欲, *xi* 喜, *nu* 怒, *ai* 哀, *le* 樂) and in the case of virtue, what we see is not *qing* but *yu*. The question that begs to be asked is why? Was Zhuangzi associating Laozi's concept of no-desire with the praxis of non-deliberate action (*wuwei* 無爲), rendering *qing* more substantial and universally applicable? Given four of the five occurrences of *wuqing* are in chapter 5—in the exchange between Huizi and Zhuangzi on the emotional state of human beings<sup>4</sup>—while the fifth is in chapter 6, there seems to be something more going on than Zhuangzi simply matching Laozi's phraseology case for case, but what could this be?

To return to the *Daodejing*, of the five instances in which no-desire is used, three of them (chapters 1, 3, and 34) are in the context of constancy (*chang* 常) while the remaining two (chapters 37 and 57) are related to simplicity (*pu* 樸). Said differently, the first three, in being associated with constancy, are descriptions of the reality of the Dao while the remaining two show how oneness with the Dao can be applied to the world of humanity. Being without desire is, for Laozi, achievable when the common people (*min* 民) are free of knowledge and return to a life of simplicity. Laozi does not state what the nature of desire entails other than pursuing fame and benefit; indeed, the three examples of no-desire in the *Zhuangzi* also speak of reducing the ambitions of the masses (*baixing* 百姓) to a state of simplicity and ignorance. What is clear, then, is that being without desire is not the main focus of Zhuangzi's attention when it comes to exposing the weakness of human nature, a task which falls to emotion. Indeed, unlike the four-sixes we see in chapter 23,

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ter 34: “[Dao] clothes and rears the myriad things without lording over them, being always without desire, it can thus be named amongst the small 衣養萬物而不為主，常無欲，可名於小;” chapter 37: “In nameless simplicity, they can also be without desire 無名之樸，夫亦將無欲;” and chapter 57: “When I am without desire, the common people naturally turn to simplicity 我無欲而民自樸” (Lou 2008: 1, 8, 85, 91, and 150 respectively).

<sup>3</sup>No-desire occurs in *Zhuangzi* chapter 4 (*renjianshi* 人間世): “As I only eat food that is coarse and not rich, my cooking lacks the desires and refinement of others 吾食也，執粗而不臧，爨無欲清之人;” chapter 9 (*matu* 馬蹄): “Together without knowledge, their virtue does not depart; together without desire, this is known as pure simplicity 同乎無知，其德不離；同乎無欲，是謂素樸;” and chapter 12 (*tiandi* 天地): “Of the ancients who nourished the world, they were without desire and the world was satisfied; they practiced non-deliberate action and the myriad things were transformed; they remained deep and silent and the common people were composed 古之畜天下者，無欲而天下足，無為而萬物化，淵靜而百姓定.”

<sup>4</sup>The text reads: “惠子謂莊子曰：人故無情乎？莊子曰：然。惠子曰：人而無情，何以謂之人？莊子曰：道與之貌，天與之形，惡得不謂之人？惠子曰：既謂之人，惡得無情？莊子曰：是非吾所謂情也。吾所謂無情者，言人之不以好惡內傷其身，常因自然而不益生也。惠子曰：不益生，何以有其身？莊子曰：道與之貌，天與之形，無以好惡內傷其身。今子外乎子之神，勞乎子之精，倚樹而吟，據槁梧而瞑。天選子之形，子以堅白鳴” (Guo 1985: 221–222).

chapter 12 (*tiandi* 天地) provides us with a more detailed account in the form of five-fives:

There are five things that cause the inborn nature to be lost: the first is the five colors confuse the eye such that clarity of vision is lost; the second is the five sounds confuse the ear such that intelligence of hearing is lost; the third is the five scents penetrate the nose such that the forehead is blocked; the fourth is the five flavors muddy the mouth such that taste is distorted; the fifth is interest and abandon unsettle the mind such that the inborn nature flies about. These five things are all sources of injury to life.

且夫失性有五：一曰五色亂目，使目不明；二曰五聲亂耳，使耳不聰；三曰五臭薰鼻，困悞中顙；四曰五味濁口，使口厲爽；五曰趣舍滑心，使性飛揚。此五者，皆生之害也 (Guo 1985: 453).

Sight, sound, smell, and taste are sensory experiences that inform our likes and dislikes and subsequently shape and mold our life-path. The danger to our inborn nature arises when preferences driven by our sensory faculties become a source of fondness and properness. Disorder of sight results in abandonment of clear vision, disorder of hearing results in losing the power to fully hear things, saturation of odor creates a sense of unease, perversion of taste deadens the mouth, while embracing our likes and abandoning our dislikes unsettles the mind, sending our inborn nature into a frenzy. These five-fives thus injure life by scattering what was once collected, disturbing what was once still, and distorting what was once clear. We are driven away from the path of the Dao and onto that of humanity; we are ejected from our harmonious co-habitation with the myriad things of the world and thrust into a reality built upon falsity and deception. Our emotional makeup is hence a barrier to actualizing the full potential of the Dao and so we must dismantle the pedestal upon which it is placed.

Since Zhuangzi's argument for a state of no-emotion occurs in chapter 5, the above passage from chapter 12 not only serves as an elaboration on why we ought not to embrace these five sources of injury, it also confirms his theory that emotion is not essential to perfecting one's Dao-given nature. The phrase "lose one's inborn nature" (*shixing* 失性) does not occur in the *Daodejing* but in the *Zhuangzi*, it only appears in chapters 12, cited above, and 16 (*shan xing* 繕性) which says: "Those who lose themselves to things and lose their inborn nature to vulgarity, such people are called the inverted ones 喪己於物，失性於俗者，謂之倒置之民." To pursue things is to chase what is external and when one pursues what is external, one loses sight of what is already present within. Losing sight of that which is a permanent part of our nature is to becloud it with vulgar ideas and standards of knowledge; it is the antithesis of carefree wandering (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙游) and the praxis of *wuwei*. In other words, we confuse the insignificant with the significant and the magnificent with the banal.

But what does it mean to relinquish one's inborn nature to sensory emotion? The opening lines of chapter 16 explain:

Those who wish to correct their inborn nature through vulgar learning so as to restore it to its original condition, and those who wish to regulate their desires through vulgar thinking so as to elevate their intelligence to its highest, such people are called deluded and ignorant.

繕性於俗，俗學以求復其初，滑欲於俗，思以求致其明，謂之蔽蒙之民（Guo 1985: 547).<sup>5</sup>

There appears to be a connection between one's nature and desires, and the process of learning and putting such knowledge to use. Taking the latter pair to induce change in the former is criticized by Zhuangzi for using what is artificial to oversee what is natural; however, if we take our nature and naturally-bestowed desires as being inherently in accordance with the Dao, then the knowledge gained therein will likewise accord with the Dao and prove beneficial. It is only when we do the reverse that we become misguided and unaware of our connection to the Dao. Knowledge of the ways of humanity thus impede our desire to follow the Dao and when our desire to live harmoniously with the myriad things of the world is obstructed, our inborn nature is injured to such an extent that it will be unable to save us from the selfishness and ignorance that led to its corruption in the first place.

To return to the passage cited earlier from chapter 12, emotional corruptibility arises the instant we decide the world is comprised of five colors, five sounds, five smells, and five flavors. Bearing these five in mind, our likes and dislikes issue forth in a stream of certainty and self-confidence that all there is to know of the world is contained within these sets of five. Little do we realize, however, that these five-fives only apply to human beings; they say nothing of the reality of the myriad things of the world. And yet, we cling to our faith in these five-fives, believing our feelings for them are both genuine and beyond doubt. If our eyes refrain from looking past the spectrum of primary colors, they will remain blind to non-color; if our ears refuse to take non-sound as sound, they cannot take refuge in silence; if our nose seals itself off from unpleasant odors, it cannot catch the scent of that which is odorless; and if our mouth is left agape upon tasting what is tasteless, it will stammer as it tries to convey such an inexplicable happenstance.

There is a bond between how we feel towards the world and how we think about it. To think is to do so through feelings; it is to signify the ephemeral. Feelings are both ineffable and fickle, which is why we express them in words, for words are supposed to have a level of fixity about them. Though words *qua* names may be fixed, their meaning is contextual while the reality of the object they are targeting is fluid and hence relative. This is why Zhuangzi declared the five senses are injurious to life. If we are to partake in the oneness of the Dao, then our inborn nature must become indistinguishable from it; to use the fixity of names to latch onto what is by nature fluid is to destroy the latter in pursuit of the former. This particular guise of human nature is not that of the common people, whose lives are ruled by emotion, but that of the sage. The reason the sage's inborn nature is unaffected by names or resigned to thinking of the world as but one of five possible sensory realities stems from the fact that the sage experiences things as a collectivity of multiplicities that are nothing more than traces of the Dao.

<sup>5</sup> Discussing the root of people's deluded thinking is the focus of chapter 21 (*jie bi* 解蔽) of the *Xunzi* 荀子.



The role of the trace (*ji* 跡) and its formlessness (*wuxing* 無形) is central to Zhuangzi's doctrine of no-emotion and we first read of it in this passage from chapter 2 (*qiwulun* 齊物論):

Happiness, anger, sorrow, joy, worry, regret, fickleness, rigidity, modesty, willfulness, frankness, audacity ... it is as if they have a true ancestor, but no trace of it can be found. It moves, this is true, but its form remains unseen. It has emotion and is without form.

喜, 怒, 哀, 樂, 慮, 嘆, 變, 愁, 姚, 佚, 啟, 慙……若有真宰, 而特不得其朕。可行已信, 而不見其形, 有情而無形 (Guo 1985: 51–55).

We can understand the above as follows: the twelve emotive outcomes indicate the variegated responses we encounter in life and are akin to the wind blowing through the myriad openings found throughout the natural world. As the Dao blows through us, what transpires is a nameless emotion and the same is true for the wind. The Dao and wind are themselves empty of emotive substance, however, it is the act of their passing through (*tong* 通) things that produces what humanity labels color, sound, and so forth.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the last two sentences of the above passage, we can turn to the Ming dynasty commentator LU Xixing 陸西星 (1520–1606 CE) for guidance: “It is because we cannot grasp its form [the Dao] that we cannot grasp its presence. Since we cannot grasp its presence, it becomes dim and obscure. Thus, when the last sentence [of the passage cited above] speaks of a true ruler having emotion but being formless, having emotion allows it to make use of men while being formless allows it to remain without presence. How perfect!”<sup>7</sup> Since the non-emotion of the Dao resides within the myriad beings of the world, its presence in them goes unseen, hence it formless. Should the non-emotion of the Dao be obscured in things due to their fixation on the five emotions, though the Dao will continue to act, its form will remain elusive. In other words, what allows the Dao to be the true ruler of things is its emotion of non-emotion and presence without form.

The corruptible power of emotion is thus found not in emotion itself but in our erroneously assigning it to the Dao. When things take shelter in the Dao, they find comfort in its midst and so are joyous; when things abandon the Dao, they lose its protective nurturing and find themselves isolated from it, hence they are spiteful. In both cases, the nature of the Dao remains constant. It is we and our reception of the Dao that fluctuates and faced with uncertainty and instability, we cling to emotions as if they were of our own creation, forgetting that it was the Dao who first formlessly moved them within us. We can overcome the harm we inflict on our inborn nature by adopting an attitude of no-emotion whereby the oneness with the Dao never deserts us and we can live our lives free of the anxiety and injury caused by the need to cling to or avoid a particular emotional disposition.

<sup>6</sup>The question as to whether or not music embodies emotion was a major talking point for *Xuanxue* 玄学 thinkers such as Ji Kang and Ruan Ji. For more, see Chai 2009.

<sup>7</sup>Lu's text reads: “只為不得其形, 故無朕可得; 無朕可得, 終屬朦朧, 故下一句, 言真宰有情而無形, 有情故能使人, 無形故不得其朕也。善乎!” (Lu 2010: 19).

### 3 Zhuangzi's Doctrine of No-Emotion

The main argument for Zhuangzi's doctrine of no-emotion appears at the end of chapter 5 (*dechongfu* 德充符) and is spread across two sections of text: the first describes the virtue of the sage; the second, more detailed account, is a debate between Zhuangzi and Huizi. Owing to the unique nature of Zhuangzi's argument, the exegesis that follows will include a number of commentarial readings for clarification. Should we not do so and take the text at face value, not only would we risk over-simplifying it, we might miss Zhuangzi's message altogether. Here, then, is the first argument for no-emotion:

[Although the sage] has human form, he lacks the emotional state of a human. In having human form, he congregates with people; since he lacks the emotional state of a human, right and wrong do not affect him.

有人之形，無人之情。有人之形，故群於人；無人之情，故是非不得於身 (Guo 1985: 217).

Before turning to the commentaries, here are a few preliminary observations. One, the sage is outwardly familiar looking and does not present himself in any bizarre manner. Two, though he may be mistaken for a common person, he is inwardly different in that he lacks their emotions. Three, despite not sharing their emotions, the sage nevertheless congregates with others and does so successfully. Four, as he lacks emotion of the common sort, the anxieties that accompany right and wrong do not affect him. The sage is thus able to secure his life by relegating mundane feelings to the level of physical existence, enabling him to remain without emotion at the level of spirit and thus harmonize with the Dao. It would seem, therefore, that his congregating with other people acts to reinforce his inner-outer realms of personhood. The inner realm is what brings him into unison with the myriad things of the world, while the outer realm allows him to assimilate with other humans so as to teach them the arts of the Dao.

The first commentator we shall turn to is Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 252 CE). What is noteworthy about Guo's reading is his use of the phrase "principle of self-satisfaction" (*li zhi zizu* 理之自足):

As for the life of those who are without emotion, how can one know what such a life feels like? Since Huizi did not explain the form and appearance of he who is without emotion but returned to his line of questioning, Zhuangzi speaks of the right and wrong of emotion, but if this is the case, there must be that which is neither right nor wrong, liked nor disliked. Though having form and appearance points to one's body, what does emotion depend on to issue forth? Not letting like and dislike harm his body is to accept what is before you without emotion; to let things be themselves and not use them to assist life is to stop here and go no further. Huizi seems not to understand the self-creation of life or the self-satisfaction of natural order. Zhuangzi thus tells him again that the principle of life self-satisfaction can be found in form and appearance, and that once one accepts this, there will be self-existence. Emotions of like and dislike thus only injure one another.

夫人非情之所生，則生豈情之所知？惠子未解形貌之非情而復有問，莊子謂以是非為情，則無是非好惡者，雖有形貌，直是人耳，情將安寄？不以好惡傷身任當而直前者，非情也因自然而不益生止於當也。惠子猶未明生之自生，理之自足。莊子又告以生理自足於形貌之中，任之則自存，好惡之情祇足以自傷耳 (Fang 2012: 733).

According to GUO Xiang, self-existence arises when things follow their natural mandate, an ordering of life that imbues things with the tools necessary for life. The concepts of right and wrong, like and dislike, might be enough to point to the heart-mind of common men but they are not sufficient to reveal the root of emotion. Whilst Zhuangzi holds this root lies in the Dao, GUO Xiang is arguing it lies in things themselves. Things are self-creating (*zisheng* 自生), self-satisfying (*zizu* 自足), and self-existing (*zicun* 自存), the result of which is that feelings of like and dislike injure one another (*zishang* 自傷). Authentic emotion, we can say, lacks the weight of right and wrong and so transcends the form and appearance of emotion as it persists in the mundane world of men. Identifying with the Dao, the sage relinquishes all dependency on his physical self and so is formless; in being free of body and heart-mind (recall the story in chapter 6 of Yan Hui sitting in forgetfulness), there is no aspect of his existence to which right and wrong can attach themselves. The sage is thus immune to the perils of what is subjectively liked and disliked because he holds fast to the principle of life and the natural order of the world. Such being the case, the designations of right and wrong, like and dislike, can only turn upon each another.

Examining the commentary of CHENG Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–655 CE), there is a hint of ecstatic wonderment in his words:

The sage is like the dust of the world; to have life is to place one's form in danger. To embody the Dao is to be empty and forgetful, to not worry over right and wrong. When the light of chaos spouts forth, everything in the world comes together. This explains the sage having human form. It is a metaphor for the true spirit, a recognition that to be cut-off from it is to be without our inborn nature. Since I have forgotten the thingness of my selfhood, how can there be right and wrong? This explains why the sage lacks the emotional state of humanity.

聖人同塵在世，有生處之形害；體道虛忘，無是非之情慮。和光混迹，群聚世間。此解有人之形。譬彼靈真，絕無性識；既忘物我，何有是非。此解無人之情故也 (Guo 1985: 219).

Unlike the self-creativity we saw with GUO Xiang, CHENG Xuanying most definitely upholds the centrality of the Dao in attaining the paradigmatic state of non-emotionality. It is less about accepting what comes before oneself without emotional judgement as GUO Xiang argued, and more about conjoining with the myriad things of the world through the releasement of one's personhood. We arise from the spark of primal creation pure and unhampered by notions of right and wrong; though we share a common form, the inborn nature of humanity is originally united by way of the virtue of the Dao. In this state of collective being, we have yet to speak of individual personhood; since the sage in Zhuangzi's time finds himself in a world that is increasingly distant from the Dao, it is necessary for him to maintain his harmony with it via the praxis of self-forgetting and dwelling in emptiness. Such being the case, right and wrong no longer affix themselves to his heart-mind allowing for a more dynamic and authentic life. Instead of fretting over the discrepancies between his own emotions and those of the common people, the sage allows all emotions to blend into a holistic and spontaneous non-emotion.

Turning now to the commentary of Lǚ Huiqing 呂惠卿 (1032–1111 CE), we immediately see a difference when compared to those of GUO Xiang and CHENG Xuanying in that it stresses the role of the body and the need to insulate it against the external world:

To have human form but not human emotion is to wander in true forgetting. To congregate with people is to wander in the world of convention, while right and wrong do not affect him is to rest in the heavenly measure of things. To grasp the small is to congregate with people, to grasp the great is to congregate with heaven. To act in a manner suitable to one's appearance is nothing but the way of the Dao; to have one's form contain the six parts and nine openings is to be born from heaven. As these are enough for humanity, how can one doubt the possibility of our being without emotion? Huizi speaks of being without emotion as if we were a piece of wood or stone but this surely cannot apply to humanity. Zhuangzi speaks of what I have been calling emotion as right and wrong not affecting one's body. What I have been calling without emotion is not the result of like and dislike entering into and harming one's body, for if such were the case, it would simply be enough to have one's body. What need would there be to benefit life?

有人之形，無人之情，以其所遊在誠忘故也。羣於人則遊於世俗，是非不得於身，則休乎天均。得其小者，屬於人；大者，屬於天也。貌則動作威儀無非道，形則六骸九竅天而生，所以為人者足矣。奚為疑其不可以無情乎？惠子直謂無情若木石，不可以為人。莊子謂吾所謂情是非不得於身也；吾所謂無情不以好惡內傷其身也。若是則足以有其身，何必益生哉？(Lü 2009: 217)

Lǚ Huiqing's use of the term "heavenly measure" (*tianjun* 天均) is a reference to the term as it appears in chapter 27;<sup>8</sup> that he mentions it here, in the context of emotion, is unexpected. According to Lǚ Huiqing, genuine wandering requires genuine forgetting, a praxis that allows the sage to live alongside the common people whilst discarding his reliance on the emotions the common people take for granted. As he is not endeared towards vulgar learning, the sage dwells in the heavenly measure of things. Such being the case, he no longer focuses on the small aspect of life (i.e., his form) but on that which is great, and as there is nothing greater in the world than the Dao, he submits himself to its heavenly measure. In other words, the sage no longer has an emotional hierarchy (in terms of the rightness or wrongness of particular emotions) but instead greets things as they are presented to him in a manner befitting the naturalness of the Dao. What is more, since all that humans require in order to receive the life-nourishing support of the Dao are the six parts of the body and its nine openings, what is the source of our emotions? Clearly, they are introduced after our form has been determined. If emotions are learned, or bestowed to us from without, then Lǚ Huiqing's rhetorical question is valid. To be without emotion is not to be stoic, as if one were made of wood or stone; on the contrary, the doctrine of no-emotion is about preserving one's spirit by shielding it from the vicissitudes of biased thinking. Abstaining from artificial and ultimately relative social norms is to nullify their impact on one's self and when taken to its ultimate, such life-awareness

<sup>8</sup> See Zhuangzi chapter 27 (*yu yan* 寓言): "The myriad things all have the same seed and use their different forms to alternate with one another. Their start and end form a ring of which none can grasp its principle. This is known as the heavenly measure of things. The heavenly measure is heavenly differentiation 萬物皆種也，以不同形相禪，始卒若環，莫得其倫，是謂天均。天均者，天倪也" (Guo 1985: 950).

is no longer subject to the tribulations of sensory experience but partakes in the wonderment of the myriad things collectively. This is what is meant by benefitting life.

If we were to continue our examination of other commentaries, we would discover they more or less say the same thing as Lǚ Huiqing. We will, therefore, proceed to the second part of Zhuangzi's doctrine of no-emotion, which is as follows:

Huizi speaking to Zhuangzi asked: Can a person really be without emotion? Zhuangzi answered: Yes. Huizi then asked: If a person can be without emotion, how can he be called a person? Zhuangzi replied: Since Dao provides his appearance and heaven provides his form, why should we not call him a person? Huizi responded: Given you already call him a person, how can he be without emotion? Zhuangzi said: That is not what I mean by emotion. When I speak of being without emotion, what I mean is that he does not allow like and dislike to enter his body and cause him harm. He simply lets things be as they are and does not try to [use them to] benefit life.

惠子謂莊子曰：人故無情乎？莊子曰：然。惠子曰：人而無情，何以謂之人？莊子曰：道與之貌，天與之形，惡得不謂之人？惠子曰：既謂之人，惡得無情？莊子曰：是非吾所謂情也。吾所謂無情者，言人之不以好惡內傷其身，常因自然而不益生也 (Guo 1985: 220–221).

As we did with the first part of Zhuangzi's argument, we will first offer some preliminary thoughts: First, the question of whether a person can be referred to as such if they lack emotion was still new territory for thinkers in Zhuangzi's time and Huizi's consternation at Zhuangzi's reply affirms this. Second, a person can be without emotion because their humanity is bestowed to them by the Dao, not human society. Third, as our natural tendencies and bodily form are not of our own devising, to revere these alone is to be ignorant of the emotional connection we have to the myriad things of the world by way of the non-emotion of the Dao. Fourth, the sage does not allow mundane emotions (i.e., those associated with gain and loss, like and dislike) to harm his inborn nature. Fifth, the inborn nature of the sage remains intact because he does not vie with things and other people and this is part of what it means to live naturally (*ziran er ran* 自然而然). Taken together, there is clearly an emphasis placed on the emotional differences between the sage and common people. What that is, exactly, is not made abundantly clear by Zhuangzi other than it is related to how one manages right and wrong, like and dislike, and so forth.

Regarding the commentaries, we shall again avail ourselves of a few representative readings, starting with Lín Zì 林白, whose pen name was Yidu 疑獨 (Song dynasty, dates unknown):

Huizi may know his own emotions but he does not know all emotion. When Zhuangzi says the sage does not allow like and dislike to enter his body and cause him harm, this describes the emotion akin to one's life, hence it becomes heavenly. The emotions of like and dislike respond to things and stop there; they have no relation to the body. If one does not benefit life, one will only exhaust the principle of life and be unable to manage one's emotions. Since Dao provides our appearance and heaven provides our form, they cannot be harmed by like and dislike, and so it is enough to simply have our body. Your [Huizi] external spirit labors your essence such that you are now leaning against a tree; all of this gives rise to emotional accumulation. Heaven chose your countenance, which is distinctly different from things, but once again your need to benefit life confuses everyone. It is like Gongsun Long debating hard and white; you can defeat the mouths of other people but you cannot

tend to their heart-mind. This is to be ignorant of the emotion of life and follow one's fated nature.

惠子知其情而不知所以情，莊子謂不以好惡內傷其身，合性命之情而言，所以成乎天者也。好惡之情，應物而已，身無與焉。不益生，則能盡其生理，而無所措其情。道貌天形，不傷於好惡，斯足以有其身矣。今子外神勞精，倚樹據梧，此皆有情之所累也。天選子之形容，與物獨異，子又益生惑衆，若公孫龍堅白之論，能勝人之口，而不能服人之心，此不知性命之情，而受役於造化者也 (Fang 2012: 735).

LIN Zi's opening statement reminds us of the debate in chapter 17 (*qiu shui* 秋水) between Huizi and Zhuangzi over the joy of fish.<sup>9</sup> When Huizi and Zhuangzi stood on the bridge over the Hao river, Zhuangzi noted how happy the fish were but Huizi retorted that Zhuangzi, not being a fish, was unqualified to speak on this matter. After much back and forth, Zhuangzi declared he knew the emotional state of the fish by simply observing them! The argumentative construction of the fish story is identical to the one on no-emotion: Zhuangzi makes a claim which Huizi refutes on the grounds that he is not said thing, to which Zhuangzi rejoins that Huizi is only himself and so is unable to know what anyone else does, whereupon Huizi claims it is precisely because he is not anyone else (i.e., Zhuangzi) that he can question what they claim to know. In the context of emotion, LIN Zi's remark that Huizi only knows emotion on a personal, as opposed to universal level, is absolutely correct. But how can a person know of emotion beyond their own understanding? This seems to be the point Huizi wants to argue. True emotion *qua* the non-emotion of the Dao has no bearing on the physical self. Indeed, one of the reasons for humanity's ignorance of the Dao is because we superimpose artificial values onto our daily encounter with the world and convert said experience into an emotional framework. The sage, however, transcends emotion insofar as he has already learnt to do away with value claims that take binomial distinctions as their foundation. Since the sage embraces the non-emotion of the Dao and adheres to its empty tranquility, he preserves all emotions in a state of spontaneous namelessness. This is what is meant by becoming heavenly.

LIN Zi mentions the "principle of life" (*sheng li* 生理), which we saw earlier in the commentary of GUO Xiang, and he warns us that failure to benefit life will cause us to exhaust its principle. When the principle of life is lost, this impacts our ability to harmonize our emotions. It would appear that LIN Zi is contradicting the original text, however, he is actually criticizing Huizi for failing to cultivate his inborn nature to the level needed to reach the heavenly, hence he situates emotion with his physical self, rendering both unmanageable. Had he realized that our appearance and form are not of our own design, he would have agreed with Zhuangzi that the emotions of right and wrong, like and dislike, are not an inherent part of our being. To this end, Huizi is no different from the sophist Gongsun Long 公孫龍<sup>10</sup> who

<sup>9</sup>For more on this story, see Chai 2021.

<sup>10</sup>Gongsun Long's (c. 320–250 BCE) "Treatise on Hard and White" (*jianbai lun* 堅白論) is but one of six essays he is known to have written, the others being: "Treatise on a White Horse" (*baima lun* 白馬論), "Treatise on Same and Difference" (*tongbian lun* 通變論), "Treatise on Pointing and



quibbles over the semantic reality of things when what he should be doing is learning to attune himself to the rhythmic transformations of the Dao.

The first half of WANG Pang's 王雱 (1044–1076 CE) commentary mirrors that of LIN Zi. Where it comes into its own is the notion that emotion pushes us to seek benefits that are excessive and these, in turn, lead to spiritual exhaustion. WANG Pang writes:

Regarding emotion, it harms the inborn nature. When a person is born, his appearance comes from Dao, his form is received from heaven, and everything occurs just so. Only emotion injures what is just so, and what is just so becomes what is not just so. Huizi is unable to comprehend this and hence asks: How can a person without emotion still be called a person? Zhuangzi replies that he does not allow like and dislike to harm his body, adding: He simply lets things be as they are and does not try to benefit life. Regarding like and dislike being born from emotion and harming one's body, if one has likes and dislikes then life will no longer seem good enough and one will instead desire benefits that are excessive. With excessive benefit comes the need to serve external things, and in serving things one uses one's spirit; over using one's spirit, however, leads to exhaustion. When there is exhaustion there will be emotion, and when emotion cannot stop, there will be muddled confusion and nothing else. In this way, we can see that in following one's fated nature, being unable to conjoin with the myriad things, one will be confused over hard and white, similarity and difference.

夫情者，性之害也。人之生則貌出於道而形受於天，皆正正而已矣。惟情戕害其正正而正正所以不正矣。惠子不知其然，而以為人而無情何以謂之人，故莊子答之以不以好惡傷其身，又曰：常因自然而不益生。夫好惡生於情而害於身，有好惡則以生為不足而欲其過度而益也。過度而益則外役於物，役於物則用神，神大用則疲，疲則有所感，感而不已則昏瞋而已矣。如此則見役於造化而不能與萬物為一，所以惑於堅白同異也 (Fang 2012: 733–734).

WANG Pang's argument that excessive benefit gives rise to a form of external servitude is both intriguing and astute. Our predilection for making judgments based on an emotional connection to the situation at hand pushes us to look past our natural condition as an inherently self-sufficient mode of being and supplement it with artificial benefit derived from the outside world. The problem with doing so, according to WANG Pang, is that our comfort in serving external things will eventually override our predisposition to live naturally. Since following the Dao *qua* our inborn nature requires no effort, our spirit remains intact and unperturbed by our lesser inclinations. Chasing excessive benefits to life, however, requires an inordinate effort of spirit and body, the outcome of which is exhaustion. It is at this stage that corruptive emotion comes to bear, and when it proves unstoppable, we are left in a state of muddled confusion (*hun ming* 昏瞋) from which there is little hope of recovery. This explains why the sage treasures his connectedness to the Dao and the myriad things of the world above all else; it also explains why he adheres to the idea of non-emotion, for to be otherwise is to be cut-off from the equanimity of the Dao. When one fails to learn from the Dao and instead gets entangled by the binary feelings of similarity and difference, one will be just like Gongsun Long, caring only about separating hard from white (i.e., class and attribute).

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Things" (*zhiwu lun* 指物論), "Treatise on Name and Actuality" (*mingshi lun* 名實論), and "Storehouse of Traces" (*jifu* 跡府).



Our third and final commentary belongs to LU Xixing 陸西星:

The words “benefit life” are derived from Laozi’s “benefitting life is called inauspicious”<sup>11</sup> and this is known as aiding the benefit of that which is beyond life, of which humanity is a part. Huizi weakened his strong argument by declining to say how one’s body also benefits from life. Hiding our emotion and desire is not part of our original nature but is restlessly born in the interaction of men and women, thus we rely on this to get our bodies. Now, to not benefit life and join with others is also not good, hence Huizi says: Not benefitting life, how can he have a body? Zhuangzi did not engage this line of debate but instead said: There is no need to benefit life for Dao provides his appearance and heaven provides his form. The principle of life is itself enough to complete oneself and with this original sufficiency, if one cannot obey his naturalness, then right and wrong, like and dislike, will arise with it and one will chase falsity and bewitch the real, not following what lacks benefit, and be harmed once again.

益生二字，本於老子益生曰祥，謂裨益於所生之外，而以人為參之也。惠子窮其強辯，卻說人之有身亦自益生中得來。蓋情欲之感亦非本有，介然而生於男女之交，人因托此而有身。今不益生，則連人亦無，故曰：不益生，何以有其身？莊子不與之辯，卻以正答言：生不必益也，道與之貌，天與之形，生理本自完足，於本足中不能順其自然，橫起是非好惡，逐妄迷真，非徒無益，而又害之 (Lu 2010: 86).

LU Xixing makes an important distinction between inborn emotion and acquired emotion. We humans are born with fundamental emotions but they are neither named nor shrouded in moral significance. Where we learn to hide and misrepresent our emotions comes about via our interaction with other people. It is interesting that during our daily encounter with the natural world, we experience emotions yet they remain unspoken. It is only due to others compelling us to give voice to what we feel that we are invited into a social community. This socialization defines us as persons and instills in us a measure of self-worth; if we choose to remain outside the human social sphere, we will remain as much an outsider as when we do not display or convey emotion. Given the sage wishes to mend the errors of human thinking by advocating a principle of life rooted in oneness with the Dao, in order for him to succeed, he must find himself amongst other people. Although he congregates with others, the sage does not allow their likes and dislikes to enter his heart-mind and corrupt his bond to the Dao.

The lesson to be learned from Zhuangzi’s doctrine of no-emotion is that we should not chase falsity and bewitch the real, nor embrace what is inconstant in nature if we wish to partake in the constant, hidden benefit of Dao. We are told by Zhuangzi to simply accept our natural form and not question why it is such. To go along with the natural and not complicate matters by employing external measures is how we can benefit life without purposely doing so. Although being open to all emotions is a prerequisite to living a natural life, we have yet to explain what form this hidden benefit takes, a task to which we shall now turn.

<sup>11</sup> See *Daodejing* chapter 55: “Knowing harmony is called constancy, knowing constancy is called illumination, and benefitting life is called inauspicious 知和曰常，知常曰明，益生曰祥” (Lou 2008: 145–146).

## 4 The Benefit of No-Emotion

The previous section made a concerted effort to lay bare some of the more nuanced readings of Zhuangzi's doctrine of no-emotion. The objective of this section is to explain how the praxis of no-emotion can benefit life; as no direct answer is provided in chapter 5 of the *Zhuangzi*, we must look elsewhere. The most pertinent discussion occurs in chapters 11 through 13 but there is one passage in chapter 6 (*dazongshi* 大宗師) that, while not speaking directly to no-emotion, broaches the issue in the appended commentaries. The passage in question reads:

As for the Dao, it has emotion and reality but is without action or form. It can be transmitted but not received, grasped but not seen. It is its own source and root and so existed before heaven and earth, from time immemorial.

夫道，有情有信，無為無形；可傳而不可受，可得而不可見；自本自根，未有天地，自古以固存 (Guo 1985: 246–247).

The clue as to the benefit of no-emotion lies in the relationship between the manifest and the hidden, between emotion and reality, and non-deliberate action and non-form. The Dao's self-composure grounds itself in still, empty quietude and its tendency to revert from a state of disclosure to one of obscurity allows it to act as an existential clearing for humanity.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Guo Xiang, "the emotion of no-emotion is non-deliberate action; the emotion of constant nothingness is formlessness 無情之情，無為也；常無之情，無形也" (Fang 2012: 840). Non-deliberate action and formlessness complement one another by availing themselves of the ontological nothingness of the Dao.<sup>13</sup> Prior to the active state of doing there is the restive state of non-doing; prior to visible form there is mysterious non-form. Each gives rise to the other and together they mutually sustain one another, forming an inseparable pair. This coupling of opposites also applies to the emotions; indeed, emotion emerges from a state of non-emotion, a supra-sensory awareness of the world that is unguided by moral motivations or conditions of the heart-mind. The sage thus resides in a realm free of emotion in that he stays grounded in the constancy of nothingness. Engaging in non-deliberate action and showing no attachment to his physical form, the sage wanders in the world of men unhindered by emotions and the judgments that are inevitably attached to them. His only emotion is non-emotion and so he sojourns in the world in perfect equanimity. By welcoming all emotions equally, as the Dao does, the sage reduces them to one inert, amorphous body. In this way, he carries the emotion of the world within himself yet remains unhindered by its individual needs, benefitting from it without depending on anything in particular. Thus, when the sage abides by the life-giving principle of the Dao, he also partakes in its life-giving emotion; however, as the Dao is formless, silent, and empty, this life-giving emotion is rendered as non-emotion, which is why the sage is described as lacking emotion.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the clearing, see Chai 2014.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the relationship between nothingness and Dao, see Chai 2019.

For LIN Zi, we see him once again refer to the “emotion of life” (*xingming zhi qing* 性命之情), a phrase he also used when commenting on the debate between Huizi and Zhuangzi that we examined earlier. What is interesting is that Zhuangzi himself does not use this phrase anywhere in the Inner chapters; the only time it does appear are in chapters 8, 11, 14, and 24. According to LIN Zi, the doctrine of no-emotion benefits life because:

[The Dao’s] emotion is called the emotion of life. Its reality is to signal all in its midst; it cannot act on its own and so remains in constant naturalness such that Yin and Yang cannot be of service to it. The emotion of the Dao lies in the myriad things, hence things are born without disobeying it. In succeeding, it has yet to experience action; in responding to things, it has yet to experience form. As for what can be transmitted and received, it is that which is inseparable from things; one can obtain and see it but cannot be separated from its expression. Transmitting what cannot be transmitted, it thus cannot be received; obtaining what cannot be obtained, it thus cannot be seen.

情謂性命之情。信者，其中有信，莫之為而常自然，陰陽之所不能役也。道有情於萬物，故物生而不違。然成功而未嘗有為，應物而未嘗有形也。夫可傳可受者，未離乎物；可得可見者，未離乎色。傳無所傳，故不可受；得無所得，故不可見 (Fang 2012: 842).

The key point to take away from this is that authentic emotion belongs to the Dao alone insofar as the Dao invests itself in the myriad things it gives life to. Since it brings things to life via response as opposed to direct action, discretely via formlessness as opposed to rigid presence of being, the Dao stands as a signpost for the world. The emotion of life is thus akin to life itself, a creative process whereby the Dao expresses itself in an insoluble act of formless non-doing. Without acting, there is nothing to transmit, and when there is nothing to transmit, there is nothing to receive. This reflects Laozi’s idea in chapter 2 that “the sage dwells in matters of non-deliberate action and utilizes the teaching of no-words 是以聖人處無為之事，行不言之教” (Lou 2008: 6). Since the vitality of the Dao is instantiated in the myriad things of the world, the latter cannot take leave of the former without suffering irreparable harm. Said harm, however, also works in reverse: when recognition of the Dao’s virtue declines to such an extent that the sage retreats from the world, the Dao suffers from humanity’s ensuing ignorance. As a result, the emotion of life is a wordless transmission and in light of its traceless nature, it is cloaked in a veil of mystery, hence we cannot remove ourselves from its expression.

Of the several ways in which the *Zhuangzi* expounds the “emotion of life,” that in chapter 11 (*zai you* 在宥) is most representative:

Since the three dynasties onwards, there has only been a noisy racket ending in matters of reward and punishment. What leisure do men have to rest in the emotion of life! ... If the world rests in the emotion of life, whether these eight [delights] exist or not makes no difference. If the world does not rest in the emotion of life, these eight [delights] will start to be lumped and bent, tangled and unkempt, bringing chaos to the world ... With non-deliberate action, the sage rests in the emotion of life. He thus treasures his self as he does the world, and so can be entrusted with it.

自三代以下者，匈匈焉終以賞罰為事，彼何暇安其性命之情哉！……天下將安其性命之情，之八者，存可也，亡可也；天下將不安其性命之情，之八者，乃始嚮卷，猶囊而亂天下也……無為也，而後安其性命之情。故貴以身於為天下，則可以託天下 (Guo 1985: 365–369).

Resting in the emotion of life is another way of saying one maximizes the benefit of the Dao. Only he who dwells in oneness with the Dao can be entrusted to manage the world because only such a person has realized the transformative power of non-emotion. When common people get caught-up pursuing that which has no benefit to life they afford themselves no rest, and without partaking in the Dao's tranquility, they deplete their spirit and wear-out their bodies. It is tempting to think of Zhuangzi's doctrine of no-emotion as a type of self-cultivation and in a way it is. However, it might be more appropriate to regard it as one of the key traits of Daoist life praxis. Together with non-deliberate action, no-emotion underscores humanity's erroneous thinking towards self-betterment and world unity. It is all too easy to lose oneself to the vicissitudes of our emotions without realizing how detrimentally they affect our contact with the myriad things and, ultimately, the Dao.

## 5 Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring the corruptive power emotion has on our inborn nature before turning to Zhuangzi's doctrine of no-emotion and the benefit it brings to life. What we learned was Zhuangzi's deep mistrust of common emotion due to the fixity of the names we assign it and, more importantly, its inability to convey the true nature of that from which it arises (i.e., the Dao). Being dependent on our senses is hence injurious to life in that they act as a wedge between our inborn nature and the Dao. If we are to succeed in conjoining with the Dao, we must abandon the bias shown our common emotions and embrace the holism of non-emotion. To take no-emotion as one's guide, the life-praxis that follows will be rooted in non-deliberate action and formlessness. These two characteristics are not only typical of the sage, they can be achieved by everyone so long as they are prepared to follow their natural fate. What is meant by following their natural fate is to accept the principle of life, a principle whereby naturalness rules one's emotional makeup, not human desire. Benefiting life in this way, Zhuangzi's doctrine of no-emotion grants the sage and those who take after him the opportunity to be free of emotion and its negative effects by grounding themselves in the creative nothingness that is the abode of the Dao. As nothingness marks the constancy, origin, and potential of the Dao, Zhuangzi upholds these traits as realms of ultimacy. It is thus through no-emotion and the quiescent heart-mind accompanying it that humanity sees the benefit of no-benefit, and it is owing to this that no-emotion is also referred to as the emotion of life.

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# Chapter 10

## The *Zhuangzi* on *Ming* (命)



Lisa Raphals

### 1 Introduction

The view of *ming* 命 in the *Zhuangzi* is an important element among Warring States debates on the nature and activity of *ming*.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of this term encompasses a complex semantic field that includes fate, destiny, mandate and command (Raphals 2003). This topic is also part of a broader discourse on the problems of free will and what is distinctively human.

In what follows I use the word *ming* to refer to fate or destiny in the broad sense of a set pattern to the world, which may or may not be humanly knowable or divinely personified. Some parts of this pattern are immutable; others are not. I use the term fatalism to refer to beliefs that at least some events are fixed in advance and unchangeable by human agency. Fatalism is not the same as determinism: the view that every event has a cause (and is thus determined by causal chains of earlier events.)

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<sup>1</sup>Important Anglophone scholarship includes Graham 1967, Nylan 1993:35–55, and Tang Junyi 1962 and 1963. Review of the extensive Chinese and Japanese scholarship on this topic is beyond the scope of this article. This study builds on Raphals 2018.

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Since the seventeenth century, determinism has been understood as the doctrine that every event has a necessary cause.<sup>2</sup> If every event has a necessary cause, nothing can happen other than it does. Philosophers are divided over whether determinism is compatible with free will.<sup>3</sup> Fatalism differs from determinism in the nature of its challenges to claims for free will and moral responsibility. For the fatalist, some events must happen, with no need for further, or causal, explanation. The important point is that determinism does not imply fatalism. For the fatalist, “necessity” is not causal but “narrative”; it provides teleological explanations for what has happened; and focuses, not on causation, but rather on the narrative significance of actions and events (Solomon 2003: 437–439). Thus determinism and fatalism are compatible but competing modes of explanation. The fatalist is primarily concerned with understanding fate, not understanding chains of causality. So fatalism is a matter of degree. Some events may be fixed by fate, but not all events. Hard (or strong) fatalists believe that most outcomes are set, with little scope for human intervention. Weak (or soft) fatalists believe that some (or many) events occur by chance or are subject to human decision.<sup>4</sup>

There is also a view of *ming* as fatalism that is consistent with *ming* as mandate or command. Everyone receives a “mandate” from Heaven at birth, for example, Mencius’ statement (5A5) that what happens without human cause is a matter of *ming* (*mo zhi zhi er zhi zhe ming ye* 莫之致而至者命也). We do not choose the “mandate” but we do choose to obey, disregard, or even contravene it. On this view, although individual “command” is allotted, we choose whether or how to fulfill it. Our ability to do so is also affected by circumstances, and our willingness to do so depends on our abilities and essential dispositions (*qing* 情).

The *Zhuangzi* contains several dialogues about *ming* that take up these problems of fatalism, including discussions of the lifespans of both human and non-human beings.

<sup>2</sup> See Hoefer 2010. This view is based on Leibniz’s (1646–1716) “Principle of Sufficient Reason,” that any fact must have an explanation why it is the case (Leibniz 1989, 42, 150, 321). This principle was also stated by Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) as “Nothing exists of which it cannot be asked, what is the cause (or reason) [causa (sive ratio)] why it exists” (Spinoza 1925, I/158/4–9). For further discussion see Raphals 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Incompatibilists assert that determinism is incompatible with free will; as a result one must either assert free will and deny determinism or assert determinism and deny free will. Compatibilists, by contrast, accept determinism but claim it is compatible with free will. Contemporary compatibilists include John Martin Fischer, Harry Frankfurt and J. David Velleman. See Fischer, Kane, Pereboom and Vargas 2007. Fischer 2007 is particularly useful. For determinism and free will see Strawson 2011. For further discussion see Raphals 2014.

<sup>4</sup> For useful discussions of fatalism and determinism see Bernstein 1992 and Solomon 2003.



## 2 *Ming* and Allotted Lifespan in the *Zhuangzi*

The *Zhuangzi* problematizes *ming* in several ways, starting with how we can know anything about it:

莫知其所終，若之何其无命也？莫知其所始，若之何其有命也？

Nobody knows where things end; if so, how can we say they have no *ming*? Nobody knows where things begin; if so, how can we say they have *ming*? (27:958)<sup>5</sup>

Alternatively, we can understand “ends” (*qi suo zhong* 其所終) and “beginnings” (*qi suo shi* 其所始) to refer to human lifespans, rather than the cycles of heaven and earth. In that case the passage would read: “Since we do not know our ends, how can we say we have no *ming*; since we do not know how we began, how can we say we have *ming*?”

The *Zhuangzi* also raises the question of whether *ming* is predetermined, and its versions of both Confucius and Laozi. Confucius describes survival, success, wealth, competence, praise and their opposites as the alterations of affairs and the movements of *ming* (*shi zhi bian, ming zhi xing* 事之變，命之行, 5:212). He takes *ming* as one of two “great commands” (*da jie* 大戒) that govern the world: sages know what cannot be avoided, and are at peace with it as with *ming*. He concludes: “nothing is as good as realizing one’s *ming*; this is one of its true difficulties” (*mo ruo wei zhi ming, ci qi nan zhe* 莫若為致命，此其難者, 4:160). Lao Dan (Laozi) agrees that “essential nature cannot be changed, *ming* cannot be altered, the seasons cannot be held back, dao cannot be obstructed” (14:532).

But does the author(s) of the *Zhuangzi* think our lives are predetermined, either as a set lifespan or as an allotment of time with predetermined contents? Can lifespans be extended or cut off prematurely? Can they be nurtured or improved? Since the text does not offer direct answers to these questions, it is difficult to align its views with historical or contemporary views of fatalism.

A second difficulty presented by the *Zhuangzi* is the range of entities that appear to possess a *ming*, or something like a *ming*. This text does not seem to limit *ming* to humans, and rhetorically puts accounts of destiny into the mouths of animals and even plants.

A third problem raised in the text is whether someone (or something) that has a *ming* should attempt to meddle with it. Several passages appear to recommend against interfering with one aspect of *ming*: allotted lifespan. For example, the chapter titled “The Lord of Nurturing Life” (*Yangsheng zhu* 養生主) describes the misplaced grief of Lao Dan’s disciples at his death (3:128). Elsewhere, *Zhuangzi* explains to his friend Hui Shi 惠施 why he does not engage in conventional mourning for his dead wife: to do so would only show that he didn’t understand the decree (*ming*, 18:615). But it could be argued that these passages are less about fate than about understanding death as an inevitable part of life. For example, when

<sup>5</sup>Quotations from the *Zhuangzi* are from *Zhuangzi jishi*. Translations are my own, but are frequently indebted to Graham 1981.

confronted with hunger and adversity, Zi Sang 子桑 asks why Heaven and Earth would be so partial as to impoverish him. It is surely *ming*! (6:286). But his distress can also be described as a matter of accident or bad luck, without Heaven interfering in human affairs.

I argue that the *Zhuangzi* offers three approaches to the problem of *ming*. First, it identifies *ming* with lifespan (*shengming* 生命) that is in some sense allotted. Second, its account of *ming* is not restricted to humans. Third, it makes several recommendations, including the need to understand both *ming* and *qing*; the importance of cultivating pleasure or happiness (*le* 樂); and the claim that *ming* can be enhanced by transforming *qi* 氣.

The *Zhuangzi* contains several accounts of *ming* as natural lifespan. One is the praise of uselessness. Chapter 4 gives several examples of great but “useless” trees whose wood is so gnarled that no carpenter will give them a second glance. As a result, they are not cut down, reach their full growth, and live out their natural lifespans.

The *Zhuangzi* uses the terms *ming* and *fen* 分 (division) to describe the allotments that govern or command the lifespans of living things. According to *Zhuangzi* 6:

死生，命也，其有夜旦之常，天也。人之有所不得與，皆物之情也。

Death and life are because of *ming*, that there are regularities of night and day is because of Heaven. People having things in which they cannot participate is because of the configuration of living things. (6:241, cf. Graham 1981:86)

*Zhuangzi* 12 describes *ming* as part of the origin of the world, in which the One arose from nameless nothing, and had no form.

物得以生，謂之德；未形者有分，且然無間，謂之命。

When living things acquire by giving birth, this is called power. When what has not yet acquired form has allotments [*fen*], this is called *ming*. (12:424, cf. Graham 1981:156)

Elsewhere, the *Zhuangzi* applies the notion of a predestined allotment to groups, rather than individuals, including families or segments of human history: “the *ming* of the times” (*shi ming* 時命). For example, *Zhuangzi* 16 describes a situation in which the *ming* of the times was skewed and inopportune. As a result, those who understood this deepened their roots, rested on the pivot and waited, preserving dao through their own survival (16:555). Similarly, Confucius describes the courage of a sage as understanding that one’s *ming* is a matter of the times one lives in (17:596); and worries that his disciple Yan Hui 顏回 may fail to understand his own personal *ming* (18:620).

These passages suggest that *ming* is predetermined in the quantitative sense of lifespan. Nor do they address the question of whether *ming* is fixed.

The *Zhuangzi* attributes a (potential) ability to optimize lifespan through uselessness to plants, animals and humans. As the conclusion to *Yang sheng zhu* (Chapter 4) puts it:

桂可食，故伐之；漆可用，故割之。人皆知有用之用，而莫知無用之用也。

Cassia can be eaten so they cut it; lacquer can be put to use, so they strip it.

People all know the uses of the useful, but no one knows the uses of the useless. (4:186, cf. Graham 1981:74)

These “survivors” conspicuously include plants, trees, especially. They include the *chu* 樗 (ailanthus) tree that is big but useless to the carpenter (1:39), and a great oak rejected by Carpenter Shi 匠石. That tree appears to him in a dream and compares itself to cultivated trees (*wen mu* 文木) such as hawthorn, pear, orange, and pomelo. When their fruits are ripe, they are denuded: the fruit peeled off and the branches cut away:

此以其能苦其生者也，故不終其天年而中道夭，自掊擊於世俗者也。物莫不若是。

Thus their capability embitters their lives; therefore they do not live out their heaven-[allotted] years, but die prematurely, mid-life, by the axe, and bring on themselves the destruction of the world’s customs. There is no living thing for which it is not like this. (4:172, cf. Graham 1981:73)

The tree continues by advocating the importance of being useless as a matter of self-preservation:

使予也而有用，且得有此大也邪？且也，若與予也皆物也，奈何哉其相物也？

Suppose that I had been useful, could I have attained my present size? And furthermore, you and I are both living things: should one treat another this way? (4:172, cf. Graham 1981:73)

Another huge tree with gnarled, “useless” branches exclaims:

神人以此不材！

Spirit people are without use in this kind of way! (4:176, cf. Graham 1981:74)

By contrast, in the country of Song 宋, plants and animals die before their time because they are useful. Catalpa trees are cut down for tethers, cypress for roof beams, and mulberry for coffins:

故未終其天年，而中道已夭於斧斤，此材之患也。

Therefore they do not live out their heaven-[allotted] years [*tian nian*], but in mid-life die prematurely by the axe. This is the harm caused by talent. (4:177, cf. Graham 1981:74)

Elsewhere, another gnarled and ancient tree is left on the mountains and can live out its potential lifespan (20:667).

Animals also can be useless. Wildcats and weasels chase their prey but die in the hunter’s net; by contrast the slow-moving yak cannot catch anything, but is left alone (1:40).

A different kind of “use” is the excellences that make something a fit offering for sacrifice. Another passage specifies what kind of animals (including humans) are unsuitable for sacrifice:

故解之以牛之白顙者，與豚之亢鼻者，與人有痔病者，不可以適河。此皆巫祝以知之矣，所以為不祥也，此乃神人之所以為大祥也。

Therefore they decree that oxen with white foreheads, pigs with upturned noses and people with piles cannot be sacrificed to the river. All the *wu* and incantators know about this and consider them to be inauspicious, but spirit-people for this reason consider them to be very auspicious. (4:177, cf. Graham 1981:74)

These passages apply the notion of allotted lifespan (*tiannian*) to all living things – plants, animals and humans – and argue that social usefulness or aptitude interfere with any creature living out its full lifespan. These examples are used to recommend human “uselessness”: namely the “egoism” of Yang Zhu 楊朱.

Questions of the use or uselessness of things also introduce the perspective of physiognomy: the art of using physical characteristics to foretell the potential (usefulness, “fate”) of an individual or even an inanimate object. The Qianfulun 潛夫論 of Wang Fu 王符 (c.78–163) explicitly compares the physiognomist’s skill to the carpenter’s ability to assess good wood:

人之有骨法也，猶萬物之有種類，材木之有常宜。巧匠因象，各有所授，曲者宜為輪，直者宜為輿。

For humans there is the bone method, just as there are categories and types for the myriad things. With wood, for instance, there is always suitability, so that the skillful carpenter need only base himself on its shape and in each case it will provide something. The twisted will be suitable for wheels; the straight for a carriage chassis. (312, “Xiang lie” 27)

Physiognomy appears in one passage in the *Zhuangzi* as a metaphor for a broader perception of the human condition or cosmos. The recluse Xu Wugui 徐无鬼 uses the example of horse physiognomy to instruct the Marquis Wu of Wei 魏武侯:

吾相馬，直者中繩，曲者中鈎，方者中矩，圓者中規，是國馬也，而未若天下馬也。天下馬有成材，若卹若失，若喪其一。

When I physiognomize a horse, if its gallop is as straight as a plumb line, its arc as smooth as a curve, its turn as square as the carpenter’s square, and its circle as round as a compass, this is a horse of state, but not yet horse of all under heaven. A horse of all under heaven has realized its abilities to the full, as if dazed, as if lost, as if it had it had lost its identity. (24:819)

Here, the point is that the superior horse is “lost” by its broader perspective and realized capacities. In summary, these passages enlarge our understanding of *ming* in the *Zhuangzi* in two interesting ways. First, they extend the notion of *ming* in the narrow sense of lifespan or the broader sense of fate or destiny from humans to at least some other living things: plants and animals. Importantly, not all conscious beings have a *ming*. *Ming* is not attributed to gods and spirits or to conscious dead ancestors. On the contrary, *ming* seems to be constrained to mortal entities.

Second, these passages seem to understand lifespan as an upward limit, rather than a predetermined quantity, because, if lifespan were predetermined, there would be no use in uselessness. If lifespan were truly predetermined, the “useful” trees of *Zhuangzi* 4 would not die “prematurely” (*yao* 夭, 4:172); they would not fail to live out their “heaven-allotted years,” but would simply be fulfilling their *ming*. Instead, the *Zhuangzi* laments the usefulness that kills them before the upward limit of time allotted to them. These passages suggest a view that quantitative *ming*, understood as the years of a normal lifespan, is only partially determined.

### 3 Responding to *Ming*

I now turn to the third question of what kind of actions, if any, the *Zhuangzi* urges us to take towards *ming*. It makes two clear recommendations. Both refer to a state of being rather than to any action.

The *Zhuangzi* emphasizes the ability of sages to respond to the inevitability of change. For example, the mutilated sage Wang Tai 王骀, who “decrees the transformation of things” (*ming wu zhi hua* 命物之化, 5:189). Another sage, Shentuja 申徒嘉, claims that only those of real virtue:

知不可奈何而安之若命。

understand what cannot be altered but are at peace with it as with *ming*. (5:199, cf. Graham 1981:78)

He puts it in concrete terms: if you wander into the course of Archer Yi’s (Hou Yi 后羿) arrows and don’t get hit, it is *ming* (5:199). And Robber Zhi (Dao Zhi 盜跖) makes fun of the so-called sage kings who: “adhered to reputation, made light of death, and did not remember their origin or cultivate their decreed span” (29:998).

But the *Zhuangzi* also puts its recommendations in positive terms. Spirit people (*shenren* 神人): “bring about their *ming* and exhaust their *qing* (*zhi ming jin qing* 致命盡情), and so their myriad concerns disappear (12:443). Here, some living things seem able to bring about their *ming*, and to exercise choice. But for this to be possible, their *ming* cannot be completely predetermined.

To exercise choice in deliberately fulfilling or consciously disregarding *ming*, one must first understand it; it is essential to “know one’s *ming*.” But knowledge is not sufficient because many circumstances can intervene. As the *Lüshi chungiu* puts it:

夫水之性清，土者扣之。[固]，不得清。人之性壽，物者扣之。[固]，不得壽。

Now: water’s essential disposition is to be clear, earth muddies it. If this persists, it does not succeed in being clear. The original configuration [*xing*] of humans is longevity, but [certain] things muddy them. If this persists, human beings do not succeed in living to an old age. (21, “*Ben sheng*” 本生 1.2)

Here, *xing* 性 is the original configuration of beings who have agency, the power of choice, and they make choices that affect their innate predilection for longevity. Both chance and choice reconfigure the original *xing* to produce *qing*: an actual configuration of the original *xing*. When beings who understand their *ming* attempt to fulfill it, they change and expend and eventually exhaust the *qing* that corresponds to it.

Are humans alone in having this capacity? This *Lüshi chungiu* passage attributes an original configuration (*xing*) to living, and possibly non-living, things. That view of *xing* is consistent with not restricting *ming* to humans. The *xing* of humans – and in the *Zhuangzi* for other living things – is longevity, but whether we achieve it

depends on many factors, including *ming*. According to *Zhuangzi* 12:443, the ability to fully realize one's *ming* seems to be restricted to spirit-people, who complete their *ming* is by understanding and exhausting their *qing*. Presumably, spirit people alone have cultivated themselves sufficiently to do this.

Descriptions of sagacity in other passages also show sages understanding *qing* and bringing things to completion by *ming* (*da yu qing er sui yu ming* 達於情而遂於命, 14:507), by assessing the times and deciding how to act:

達生之情者，不務生之所無以為；達命之情者，不務知之所無奈何。

Those who have reached the “life” configuration do not bother about [the places] from which life has let disappear “making something out of [oneself]”; those who have reached the *ming* configuration do not bother about [the places] from which knowing has let disappear the “how it [the configuration] is to be dealt with.” (19:630, cf. Graham 1981:181)

In other words, those who reach the equilibrium of the “life” or “*ming*” configuration do not feel the urge to develop in contrary ways, hence the recommendation for emotional equilibrium. Other passages contrast *ming* to desires and ambitions, for example Confucius’ advice to Yan Hui to avoid destructive ambition (20:692).

The *Zhuangzi* also contrasts understanding *ming* and *qing* to expertise in mantic practices. Its view is that only knowledge of *dao* provides real understanding, whether of the future or of how to act. It contrasts calm sages to frenetic diviners (23:785), and seems to put understanding *ming* above any other competence:

達生之情者傀，；達於知者肖；達大命者隨，達小命者遭。

Those who reach the configuration of [corresponding to] life are remarkable; those who reach knowledge are [merely] suitable.

Those who reach the great mandate [*ming*] follow [it]; those who reach the small mandate treat it as a [happencance] encounter. (32:1059, cf. Graham 1981:182)

Such sages become models for others (25:880); by contrast, those who fail to follow their *ming* distort their natural abilities and ruin their lives (19:663). The last chapter of the *Zhuangzi* describes the sages of antiquity as:

願天下之安寧以活民命，人我之養畢足而止，以此白心，古之道術有在於是者。

wishing the world peaceful and safe enough to preserve people's allotted lives, enough food and only enough for others and themselves, using these things whiten their hearts, some of the ancient art of the way consisted in these things. (33:1082, cf. Graham 1981:278)

Finally, the chapter titled “Ultimate Felicity” (*Zhi le* 至樂) emphasizes that spirit-people combine taking pleasure with completing their allotted lifespans:<sup>6</sup>

天下有至樂无有哉？有可以活身者无有哉？今奚為奚據？奚避奚處？奚就奚去？奚樂奚惡？夫天下之所尊者，富貴壽善也；所樂者，身安厚味美服好色音聲也。

Does the empire have ultimate felicity [in it] or is there none? Does it have those who are have the possibility to give life to theirs persons [through their allotted lifespan] or does it have none? Now what to do and what to rely on? What to avoid and where to dwell? What to follow and what to forego? What to enjoy and what to hate? What the empire honors is wealth, honor, long life and reputation. What it takes pleasure in is bodily safety [lit. peace], rich food, beautiful clothing, desirable sights and pleasant sounds. (18:608–609)

<sup>6</sup>The term *le* 樂 is difficult to translate and could be rendered by “happiness,” “pleasure,” or “joy.”

The chapter concludes by stating that people who are overly concerned with happiness and don't attain it become worried and afraid. Those who do attain it mistreat their bodies (*xing* 形), and are unable to preserve their persons and thus complete their *ming* (18:611). This chapter consistently recommends preserving one's person and completing one's *ming* over conventional goodness.

Understanding *ming* as closely linked to the lifespans of living things clarifies several points. First, the *Zhuangzi* differs in important ways from other Warring States texts that also recommend that we “follow *qing* and complete *ming*” – follow one's essential nature and complete one's natural lifespan. At first glance, the *Zhuangzi* seems surprisingly conventional in recommending this, but the devil is in the details. The *Zhuangzian* version includes felicity (*le*) and taking pleasure in the world. This recipe may involve journeying beyond space and time, disregarding wealth and power, and flaunting ritual and convention. Second, understanding *ming* as life span directly links *Zhuangzi* discourses on fate and uselessness. By juxtaposing the allotments of *ming* and lifespan allotted by Heaven (*tiannian*), we see a continuum in the “fates” in all living things. The result is to put human decisions about fate within a natural continuum of living things, mirroring the *Zhuangzi*'s attitudes toward human roles in the cosmos. Thirdly, linking *ming* and lifespan shows “spirit people” in a new light, as “useless” and as taking pleasure in life.

In summary, these passages present an account of *ming* as something some people can learn to bring about (12:443). It is predetermined insofar as it comes from Heaven, a power beyond human influence. We cannot choose or change it, but we can choose how to respond to it, including the possibility of understanding or fulfilling it, or attempting to disregard or suppress it. Our response to *ming* depends on our ability to understand it and to enact choices about it, and it also depends on circumstances. In all these senses, *ming* is not predetermined. Finally, the account of *ming* in the *Zhuangzi* is linked to another fourth-century attitude toward the management of *ming*: the possibility of enhancing *ming* by transforming *qi*.

## 4 *Ming* and Self-Cultivation

Recent scholarship has identified an important fourth-century BCE self-cultivation literature in the “Inner Working” (*Neiye* 內業) chapter of the *Guanzi*.<sup>7</sup> This literature was centrally concerned with using *qi* cultivation to gain power over things in the world. However, there is a contradiction between recommending against interfering with allotted life span and recommending the enhancement of *ming* by transforming *qi*. For example, Michael Puett has argued that the *Zhuangzi* opposed these “self-divinization” practices in favor of accepting *ming* and taking pleasure in the transformations of the universe. Puett associates “spirit” (*shen* 神) with acceptance of the order of Heaven, rather than with attempting to control it (Puett 2002a, 2002b,

<sup>7</sup>For the *Nei ye* see *Guanzi* 16:1a-6b. For translation, see Rickett 1998:39–55.



2003). On his view, the *Zhuangzi* also criticizes ritual specialists for supporting the order of heaven but failing to understand it, insofar as their ritual sacrifices prevent these animal victims from living out their allotted lifespans. By contrast, spirit people (*shenren*) want them to live out their allotted years (4:177, quoted above; Puett 2003:256).

Accepting *ming* and taking pleasure in the transformations of the universe are the very qualities that are central to the *Zhuangzi*'s view of *ming*. Like Puett I think the *Zhuangzi* disapproves of using *qi* self-cultivation to gain power in the world. But the *Zhuangzian* view of *qi* and *ming* may be less passive than Puett suggests, because the living out one's allotted lifespan entails active measures, starting with deliberate "uselessness," instead of conforming to others' purposes. The *Zhuangzi* also recommends some versions of enhancing *ming* by encouraging or transforming *qi*. But which? Is there not a contradiction between following natural lifespan and enhancing *qi*?

*Zhuangzi* 22 identifies *qi* as the basis of the physical constitution of the body: "Human birth is caused by the gathering of *qi*" (22:733). Similarly, a passage in *Zhuangzi* 11 describes "harmonizing the essences of the six *qi* in order to nurture life" (*he liu qi zhi jing yi yu qun sheng* 合六氣之精以育群生 11:386). Thus *qi* would seem to be central to living out one's lifespan and completing one's *ming*. A clue to its role appears in Confucius' description of "fasting the heart-mind" (*xin zhai* 心齋) to Yan Hui:

若一志，無聽之以耳而聽之以心，無聽之以心而聽之以氣！聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。

Unify your intentions. Do not listen with your ears, but with your heart. Do not listen with your heart, but with your *qi*. Listening stops at the ears; the heart stops at its counterpart [lit. the matching tally]. *Qi* is empty and waits on things. Only *dao* accumulates emptiness; this is the fasting of the heart. (4:147, after Graham 1981:68 and Van Norden 1996:257)

Here, the *Zhuangzi* clearly prefers *qi* as a source for guidance, and specifically recommends "fasting" the heart-mind to make this possible, by creating a psychological "emptiness," that can guide action. As Bryan Van Norden (1996:257) notes, this passage directly opposes Mencius 2A2, which recommends the heart-mind over *qi*. In Van Norden's reading of the *Zhuangzi* passage, *qi* is a source of moral guidance. But it is worth remembering the context of the passage: by refraining from a "useful" but potentially dangerous political mission, Yan Hui will live to complete his *ming*.

But what does "heart-fasting" and *qi* guidance entail? The passage makes clear that it is not a matter of conventional abstention from meat and wine:

是之謂坐馳。夫徇耳目內通而外於心知，鬼神將來舍，而況人乎！是萬物之化也，禹舜之所紐也，伏羲几蘧之所行終，而況散焉者乎！

This is what is called "galloping while sitting still." If you channel your eyes and ears inward and expel knowledge from the heart, the ghostly and spirit-like [qualities] will dwell in you, and how much more the human! These are the transformations of the myriad things; the knot found by Shun and Yu, where Fu Xi and Ji Qu ended their journeys, how much more so for lesser men! (4:150, cf. Graham 1980:69)

*Qi* guidance seems to allow the spontaneous entrance of spirit-qualities, without deliberate action; direct physical *qi* transformation would be a very different account of completing one's *ming*. Both the *Zhuangzi* and Mencius give accounts of physical self-cultivation practices that aim to transform or refine the *qi* believed to constitute the body. These passages, however, describe something different: transforming one's *qi* to enhance one's *ming*.

The first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* describes spirit persons (*shenren*) who have succeeded in transforming their physical bodies and their constituent *qi*. The *shenren* of Guye 姑射 concentrate their *shen*, avoid the five grains, ride the clouds; the concentration of their *shen* protects living things from sickness and epidemic and makes the harvest ripen (1:28). This passage suggests that a realized sage can influence the lifespans of living things, plant, animal and human. But how does that influence affect *ming*? Is it changed? Enhanced? Completed? Juxtaposing the discourses of *ming* and *qi* may shed light on these questions.

These spirit persons seem to have achieved that status through both physical and meta-physical means, with no particular distinction between the two. The *Zhuangzi* does not elaborate, but texts excavated from late Warring States tombs describe methods of *qi* cultivation; and physiognomy texts work on the assumption that virtue derived from self-cultivation manifests visibly in the body. Mencius defends this view of virtue (*Mengzi* 15.518, 26.906; Lau 4A15, 7A21), and Xunzi attacks it in the chapter titled "Against Physiognomy" (Fei xiang 非相, *Xunzi* 5.86–88).

We can situate these practices in a strand of fourth-century BCE thinking about embodied virtues which stresses the need to regulate the *qi* of one's constitution in order to achieve emotional balance. Emotional balance is necessary on the *Zhuangzi*'s view in order to take pleasure in the world. This view of regulating *qi* informed ethics, medicine, metaphysics and eventually cosmology. The body-mind was composed of *qi*, which could be radically transformed – but also subtly refined – by physical self-cultivation practices. We find more information about this view of the body in writings of technical experts who in many cases were in relationships of direct competition with the textual specialists of the early philosophical traditions. These practices included therapeutic gymnastics, dietetics, breath cultivation, and sexual cultivation (Csikszentmihalyi 2004). They appear in the titles of lost texts in the "Recipes and Methods" (Fang ji 方技) section in the bibliographic chapter (*Yiwenzhi* 藝文志) of the *Han shu* (30.1701–84, Raphals 2008–2009 and 2013). These topics are part of a "nurturing life" (*yang sheng* 養生) culture concerned with the transformations of *qi* through physiological control over physical and mental processes.

Finally, in the *Zhuangzi* account, humans are fundamentally different from other living things. All have natural lifespans, but only humans have a *ming*. Even so, the portrayal of a continuum among living things distinguishes the *Zhuangzi* from other Warring States taxonomies of living things, which tend to emphasize the differences between humans and other animals. For example, in Xunzi's "scale of nature," water and fire have *qi*, grasses and trees procreate, birds and beasts have awareness, but only humans have a moral sense; humans have *qi*, procreation, awareness and morality (9:164).

In the *Zhuangzi*, natural lifespans are determined by several factors. One is the norm for the species: morning mushrooms live a day, but some trees live for centuries (1:39). For humans, there is also *ming*, an individual lifespan which is also subject to circumstance, and which – the *Zhuangzi* seems to suggest – can be optimized in some sense. Thus human lifespans are not determined purely by class membership; individual circumstances and choices also figure, and only humans make deliberate choices to optimize their *ming*. These include deliberate “uselessness,” techniques to transform *qi*, and efficacious response to change.

The *Zhuangzi* also differs from the taxonomies of the *Huainanzi*, which focus on animals as belonging to separate categories (*lei* 類, *Huainanzi* 9:286, 10:321; Major et al. 2010:310, 354). Here, the crucial human ability is language. Despite animals’ superior strength, speed, etc., humans control them because animals cannot communicate in order to act in cooperation (*Huainanzi* 15:507, 19:645, Major et al. 2010:601, 777).

Contrasting this *Zhuangzi* taxonomy to those of the *Xunzi* and *Huainanzi* helps clarify the *Zhuangzi*’s view of *ming*. Humans are not distinctive by virtue of moral sense or intelligence and language. The key difference is agency: the ability to make individual choices that make possible living out our lifespans. But the *Zhuangzi* also seems to suggest that we should not forget our continuities with other living things. Retaining our animal nature also provides an antidote to the false desires and attachments the *Zhuangzi* consistently rejects.

## 5 Ming and Death

As the above discussion makes clear, Zhuangist understandings of a good life centrally include attitudes to death and *ming*, both beyond human control. Death – a central aspect of *ming* since one of its core meanings refers to lifespan – is the most powerful and most extreme case of inevitable change. For the *Zhuangzi* authors, the ability to face death with equanimity is a sure indicator of an agent’s virtue or power (*de* 德) and of wholly fulfilled potential (*cai quan* 才全, 5:210–212, Graham 1981:80). Equanimity toward death and *ming* does not betoken passivity or any lack of agency. On the contrary, in the Zhuangist view flexible and intelligent response to what is inevitable leads to freedom from ties to things and thus release from the power of fate. As a passage about the death of Laozi puts it:

適來，夫子時也；適去，夫子順也。安時而處順，哀樂不能入也，古者謂是帝之縣解。

In coming when he did, the Master was on time; in departing when he did, the Master was on course. Be content with the time and settled on the course, and sadness and joy cannot find a way in. Of old this was called “God’s loosing of the bonds.” (3:128, Graham 1981:65)

Such persons are able “at every encounter to generate the opportune moment in their heart-minds” (*shi jie er sheng shi yu xin* 是接而生時於心, 5:212, cf. Graham 1981:80).

The story of the death of *Zhuangzi*'s wife presents key elements of these attitudes. When Hui Shi visits *Zhuangzi* to mourn, he finds Zhuang Zhou singing, rather than mourning. As he explains it:

是其始死也，我獨何能无慨然！察其始而本无生，非徒无生也而本无形，非徒无形也而本无氣。雜乎芒芴之間，變而有氣，氣變而有形，形變而有生，今又變而之死，是相與為春秋冬夏四時行也。人且偃然寢於巨室，而我嗷嗷然隨而哭之，自以為不通乎命，故止也。

When she first died, do you suppose that I was able not to feel the loss? I peered back into her beginnings; there was a time before there was a life. Not only was there no life, there was a time before there was form. Not only was there no form, there was a time before there was *qi*. Mingled together in the amorphous, something changed and there was *qi*; the *qi* changed and then there was form, the form changed and there was life. And now she has changed and has arrived at death. This is to be companion with spring and autumn, summer and winter, in the procession of the four seasons. When someone was about to lie down and sleep in the greatest of mansions, I with my sobbing knew no better than to bewail her. The thought came to me that I was being uncomprehending towards destiny, so I stopped. (18:614–615, after Graham 1981:123–124)

As Chris Fraser aptly puts it: “Death is a prominent theme in Zhuangist ethics because it is the most salient example of an inevitable natural change – an aspect of fate” (2013:420).

In summary, a Zhuangist good life requires a thorough – indeed embodied – understanding of how *ming* and death are part of the the natural processes of human life. If we are able to do so, we can optimize our power or virtue (*de*) and spontaneously “wander” (*you* 游) through “what is so of itself” (*ziran*), thereby achieving both psychological and social harmony (*he* 和)” (Fraser 2013).

## 6 Ming and Wuwei

*Ming* is linked to death in the *Zhuangzi* because death is the ultimate challenge to a realized person's equanimity in the face of inevitability. But the *Zhuangzi* also presents what could be called an “ultimate remedy” or means of action. *Ming* is also associated with acting by non-action (*wuwei* 無為, also written 无為).

As Alan Fox has pointed out (1996), the actual phrase *wuwei* appears only three times in the Inner Chapters, and in two it is closely associated with the attitudes of a Zhuangist “ideal person.” The three passages he identifies are:

- (1) 今子有大樹，患其无用，何不樹之於无何有之鄉，廣莫之野，彷徨乎无為其側，逍遙乎寢臥其下。

Now if you have a great tree and think it's a pity it's so useless, why not plant it in the realm of Nothing whatever, in the wilds which spread out into nowhere, and go roaming away to do nothing at its side, ramble around and fall asleep in its shade? (1:40, Graham 1981:47, emphasis added)

- (2) 忘其肝膽，遺其耳目；反覆終始，不知端倪；芒然彷徨乎塵垢之外，逍遙乎无為之業。

Self-forgetful right down to the liver and the gall, leaving behind their own ears and eyes, they tum start and end back to front, and know no beginning-point or standard. *Heedlessly they go roving beyond the dust and grime, go rambling through the lore in which there 's nothing to do* (6:268, Graham 1981:90, emphasis added).

Fox quotes only the key phrases (in italics here) and usefully quotes several very different translations (1996: 60–61). The third passage, which Fox does not discuss, refers to *dao*:

(3) 夫道，有情有信，無為無形

As for *dao*, it has *qing* and has trustworthiness, but it is without action [*wuwei*] and without physical form. (6: 246).

A problem arises in this passage because it is not clear whether the key phrase is best parsed as to “be without” action (*wu wei*) or to act by *wuwei*. Burton Watson translates it as “without action” (1968: 81), A.C. Graham as “[it] does nothing” (1981:86), and Brook Ziporyn as “without any deliberate deeds” (2020: 56). Nonetheless, what follows well describes *wuwei*: “[*Dao*] can be handed down but not taken as one’s own, can be grasped but not seen. Itself the trunk, itself the root, since before there was a heaven and an earth inherently from of old it is what it was” (Graham 1981:86).

In discussing these passages, Fox rightly points out that *wuwei* is associated with “roaming” and flexibility. To his remarks it can be added that they are also associated with “forgetting oneself.” Fox concludes that *wuwei*: “is not merely a way of acting, it is a way of approaching the world, of matching attitude to circumstance” (1996: 61).

Several passages in the Outer Chapters further link *wuwei* attitudes with certain attitudes toward *ming*. Several passages identify *wuwei* more explicitly as the best way to preserve one’s destiny and essential nature. A passage in Chapter 11 argues that people lose both their original configuration (*xing*) and their *ming* when they try to impose external order on things or seek rewards and avoid punishments. The chapter argues that it is better to live by *wuwei*, which, by implication, preserves *xing* and *ming*.

The argument begins with the claim that, since the Three Dynasties, people have been preoccupied with rewards and punishments, with the result that they have no time to “be at peace in the essential disposition of their original configuration and destiny” (*an qi xing ming zhi qing* 安其性命之情, 11:365).<sup>8</sup> To make matters worse, people take delight (*yue* 說) in eight things: keen eyesight and hearing, benevolence and righteousness (*ren yi* 仁義), ritual and music, and sagacity and knowledge (*sheng zhi* 聖知, 11:367). If all people were at peace in the genuineness of their inherent nature and destiny, these eight would not matter, but when they are not thus at peace, these eight delights are destructive and bring disorder on the world (11:367). The chapter goes on to recommend *wuwei*:

<sup>8</sup>The Three Dynasties (*San dai* 三代) refers to the Xia 夏 (ca. 2100–1600 BCE), Shang 商 (ca. 1600–1050 BCE) and Zhou 周 (ca. 1046–256 BCE) Dynasties.

故君子不得已而臨莅天下，莫若無為。無為也而後安其性命之情。

Therefore, when the *junzi* has no choice but to direct the world, nothing is as good as *wuwei*. With *wuwei*, he can be at peace in the essential disposition of their original configuration and destiny. (11:369, cf. Mair 1994:92)

The chapter also recommends avoiding several destructive practices. One should:

解其五藏，無擢其聰明；尸居而龍見，淵默而雷聲，神動而天隨，從容無為而萬物炊累焉。

distance oneself from one's five viscera and not over-value one's hearing and eyesight, be as still as the representative of the dead, but with a dragon perception; profoundly silent, but with the sound of thunder; spirit in motion but following from Heaven; tranquil in *wuwei*, while the myriad things move like dust in the wind. (11:369, cf. Mair 1994:92)

Elsewhere the *Zhuangzi* recommends a state of emptiness and *wuwei* (*xu wuwei*) without either emotional affects (which hinder *de*) or choice, knowledge, and ability (which block *dao*):

徹志之勃，解心之謬，去德之累，達道之塞。… 不盪胸中則正，正則靜，靜則明，明則虛，虛則無為而無不為也。

Destroy the delusions of the will; untie the absurdities errors of the heart-mind; remove the misfortunes of power; push away the obstructions of *dao*. ... when they do follow on each other in your breast, you will be correctly aligned; once correctly aligned, you will be still; once still, you will be clear; once clear, you will be empty; once empty, you can act by *wuwei*, and then there is nothing that will not be done. (34:810, cf. Mair 1994:234)

Chris Fraser (2008:124–131) has suggested that in the *Zhuangzi* *wuwei* is associated with a radical view of “psychological emptiness” (*xu* 虛), and that accounts linking “emptiness” with skilled performance describe an ideal that is distinct from *wuwei*. He associated *xu* with a view of psychological emptiness that accords it intrinsic ethical value and considers it part of a psychological state associated with a good life. By contrast, he associated *wuwei* with a “radical view” of psychological emptiness as an element of a very different ideal psychological state, associated with Daoist sages who have gone beyond quotidian human concerns and merged with *dao*.

I would argue that the above passages, taken together, suggest important links between the *Zhuangzi*'s attitude toward *ming* and its attitude toward a group of terms including *wuwei*, emptiness and roaming.

## 7 Conclusion

In conclusion, we can return to the questions with which this paper began. First, is *ming* predetermined? The *Zhuangzi* articulates three distinctive approaches. It describes *ming* as lifespan, and completing *ming* as living out that lifespan. But it also describes lifespan as “years allotted by heaven” (*tian nian*), a problem common to all living things. This formulation of the problem of *ming* removes an initial distinction between humans and other living things insofar as all living things have lifespans, and cannot always complete them.

The claim that living things can affect an allotted lifespan is consistent with a soft fatalist account of *ming*. “Allotted” at birth, *ming* is fixed as a potential but not inevitable lifespan. Bad luck or poor decisions (like being “useful”) can interfere with “living out one’s allotted span.”

A more interesting question is whether *ming* is an upper bound that cannot be exceeded. For most people *ming* is a limit that may be reached, but not exceeded. The situation is different for spirit-people, who have learned how to circumvent the normal workings of Heaven. In this way they can artificially extend potential lifespan by enhancing their *qi*. Even so, *ming* is not predetermined, either for normal humans or for spirit-people. The difference is that normal humans don’t know how to change their fates and spirit-people do. But normal humans can become spirit people. Nonetheless, *ming* is largely predetermined insofar as lifespan is a maximum limit. Otherwise, it would be meaningless to live out – or fail to – the years allotted by heaven.

A second point is that the *Zhuangzi* criterion for having a *ming* is mortality. Humans have a *ming*; ancestors and gods do not. The possibility that an animal might have a *ming* is philosophically interesting because it suggests that animals may in some sense be persons and have agency.

Importantly, the *Zhuangzi* restricts the possibility of optimizing *ming* to humans, even if they sometimes do so by emulating the equanimity of animals. Trees cannot transform their wood and animals cannot transform their natures. When animals and plants do change, it is through the actions of others, rather than by their own agency. Humans, by contrast, can choose to be “useless,” to regulate their *qi*, or follow their essential natures. Finally the *Zhuangzi* recommends some action toward *ming* insofar as it describes correct understandings of *ming* and *qing* as the central or even defining characteristics of a sage.

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**Part III**  
**Language and Metaphor**

# Chapter 11

## Language in the *Zhuangzi*



Roy Porat

### 1 Introduction

Among the many themes that can be subjected to philosophical investigation, language, in particular, poses a unique challenge, as it constitutes the core medium by which ideas are communicated and, in some views, formed. In order to undertake an unbiased examination of language, therefore, one has to become aware of one's own words, a task which cannot be taken lightly; doubting the validity of words, a standpoint which is commonly associated with Daoist philosophy, is even more challenging, as it forces the thinker to face the problem of self-reference: to paraphrase Bai Juyi's satirical criticism of the *Laozi*, how can one *say* that those who know do not speak, and still be regarded as one of the knowers?<sup>1</sup> In the following pages I will examine the treatment of language in the *Zhuangzi*, a text which was perhaps more fearless than any other work that came before it (and many that followed) when facing the challenges posed by this complicated issue, and which consequently demonstrated a fascinating tension: a masterpiece of words that according to some could have earned its fame due to its literary brilliance alone (Mair 2000: 30; Ivanhoe 1993: 639), which, at the same time, in Graham's words, "professes a boundless scepticism as to the possibility of ever saying anything" (1989a: 25).

The study of the Zhuangzian attitude towards language has become a hot topic of research in the past few decades, a process inspired both by the encounter with modern analytic philosophy (Hansen 1992: 265–303) and by new developments in our understanding of the text, especially its close relationship with the analytical discourse of its time (Graham 1969). Alongside many interpreters and translators

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<sup>1</sup>From the poem "The Philosophers" (for a translation, see Waley 1971: 173)

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who noticed the above tension, many scholars, including some of the authors of this volume (Lin 2022; Fried; Moeller), have examined from various perspectives both the use of language in the text and the theoretical models it supposedly postulated (for a partial list, see Kohn 2014: 168–177; Wang 2003; Yang 2006). The purpose of the current paper is to reflect on and enrich the existing discussion by critically examining two features of the *Zhuangzi* that characterize its unique treatment of the topic: on the one hand, the breaking of the traditional form-content separation, and on the other, the elaborate criticism of language that appears in different parts of the text. Correspondingly, the paper is divided into two, largely independent parts: the first part examines the unique style of the *Zhuangzi* and the ways it was employed to communicate its philosophical agendas, that is, the use of language in the text. Alongside reviewing the main characteristics of the Zhuangzian “indirect” form of argumentation – chiefly, its textual ambiguity and counter-intuitiveness – and the ways they might have been used as means of “bypassing” the standard use of words, this part also examines the self-reflective manner by which the Zhuangzian language is addressed in the text itself, showing that such an unusual use of words was already acknowledged as an inherent part of the Zhuangzian philosophy during the formation of the text. In the second part I will address the critique of language as it appears in the different parts of the *Zhuangzi*, and introduce three central theories regarding the inadequacy of words, each representing an independent aspect of “the problem of language.” I will then move to suggest a fourth, qualitatively different interpretation of the linguistic mechanism as derived from the second chapter, the *Qiwulun* 齊物論; according to the suggested reading of the text, the Qiwulunian author addressed language not via the prism of correspondence – whether words can or cannot describe their referents – but rather as a dynamic force within reality, which takes an active part in the way we perceive the world.

## 2 Language of the *Zhuangzi*: Form, Content, and the Value of Bizarre Words

A common tendency when analyzing a work of philosophy is to treat the content of the arguments as the essence of the text, and the style of writing – as interesting as it may be – as a more peripheral matter, that mainly reflects the talent of the writer and her literary preferences. This common view, which also stands at the basis of formal logic, relies on the assumption that any claim can be paraphrased in any genre without losing its essential gist, an intuition that is already reflected in the separation of words (*yan* 言) and meanings (*yi* 意) in the famous “fish trap” analogy: once the meaning is perceived, the words that carry it can be forgotten, like a fishing trap or rabbit snare that can be tossed aside after its prey is caught (75/26/48–49; see Sect. 3, this chapter). Despite this charming allegory, however, it has been suggested by many scholars of the *Zhuangzi* that the stylistic or aesthetic aspect of the text – a rich mixture of fables, parables, and fantastic dialogs – is at

least as important as the content of its sayings, as it may reflect an underlying philosophical agenda: the authors of the *Zhuangzi*, according to this suggestion, held a critical view of language, as evident from the many discussions on the inadequacy of words that are scattered throughout the text; instead of expressing their critique directly, however (simply *saying* that words should not be trusted), in many cases they chose to assimilate it into their own writing, employing various techniques of *indirect* argumentation that were meant to performatively demonstrate the futility of language (Watson 2013: xxii), convey an otherwise unsayable message (Allinson 1989a: 14–110), or lead the reader towards some non-verbal understanding that carries a therapeutic value (Schwitzgebel 1996; Wang 2004; Wu 1988). Naturally, this kind of reading adds a great deal of interpretive complexity, as it entails that the Zhuangzian attitude towards language is manifested in the text in two distinct manners: explicitly, in the investigation of language as a philosophical theme, like the “rabbit snare” analogy or the famous story of wheelwright Bian (see Sect. 3); and implicitly, by deliberately employing atypical ways of writing, potentially in almost every other passage of the text.

See, for example, the following short paragraph from the second chapter of the text, the *Qiwulun* 齊物論, which to some extent demonstrates both aspects:

Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn't there? (Watson 2013: 9; 4/2/23–24)<sup>2</sup>

In terms of content, this passage seems to criticize the common depiction of language as an objective means of describing reality, doubting the one-to-one correspondence between words and their referents. The idea that words have fixed (*ding* 定) meanings is so fundamentally rooted in the common depiction of human communication that it can be taken almost as an axiomatic prerequisite one must accept in order to participate in any speech act at all: there is no point in talking about an ox, for example, if there is no agreement among all interlocutors as to what the word “ox” corresponds to, and under the unlikely scenario in which a conversation about oxen is carried out while one’s “ox” is the other’s “horse” and vice versa, one might rightfully ask whether anything has actually been said. Misunderstandings of this sort might seem improbable, of course, as language is founded upon conventions; however, the fact that words are actually nothing more than a mix of sounds arbitrarily linked with certain meanings, a straightforward observation to which the author draws our attention, enables the theoretical existence of such confusions. The problem becomes even more acute when one discusses the meaning of abstract notions such as “right” and “wrong” (*shifei* 是非), as in the argument between the Confucians and the Mohists mentioned in the following lines of the text: “What the others call ‘right’ they call ‘wrong,’ and what the others call ‘wrong’ they call ‘right’ ” (4/2/26). While strongly disagreeing about the correct denotations of those terms, the philosophical rivals do share one basic assumption, which is that there is,

<sup>2</sup>Referring to Harvard Yenching *Zhuangzi Yinde* (A Concordance to Zhuangzi).

or at least there should be, one correct answer to the debate. In contrast to that axiomatic assumption, the *Zhuangzi* in this short passage makes a revolutionary suggestion: it is possible that there is no one “true” definition, as my “right” might just happen to be your “wrong” and vice versa, without any specific correspondence between the terms and the actual world. The heated debate about moral knowledge is thus rendered a mere game of signs, a discourse that by no means says nothing, but that on the other hand might say no more than the chirping of birds.

As plausible as this analysis may sound, however, it does suffer from one crucial flaw, which brings us to the second, implicit aspect of the matter: almost none of the above can be directly extracted from the text. Not only is it not explicitly stated anywhere in the passage that words say nothing, but the only direct statements that can be found in it claim the exact opposite, meaning, that words do say something and cannot be taken as a mere blowing of air. The radical idea of language being no different from the chirping of birds does not appear in the form of a factual claim, but is rather suggested as a mere speculation; and even the important observation about the unfixedness of words, at least according to one common reading of the text, is phrased in a modal manner, without committing to its validity.<sup>3</sup> The decision to phrase such an important message in such an ambiguous manner might seem surprising at first, but a closer look reveals that in fact, it is perfectly suited to the apparent message of the text: just as words have no fixed meanings, the text gives us no fixed meaning to cling on to. The Confucians and the Mohists, according to their depiction in the text, followed the false assumption that there must be a particular “right” view; the *Zhuangzi*, committing to no specific interpretation of its own words, frees the reader from this obligation (Chong 2006: 375, 382; Wu 1982: 18–23).

As we can see, therefore, already in this short passage one can find some of the key features of the Zhuangzian attitude towards language, which are further developed in other parts of the text:

1. First, the instrumentalization or concretization of language: while explicitly stating that words are not (or not just) the blowing of air, the very mention of their concrete existence as physical objects – possibly relying on the celebrated image of “the great wind” from the beginning of the chapter (Stevenson 2008) – exposes cracks in the common depiction of language as an abstract entity, something that exists independently of the world. This clever depiction of words as graspable, manipulable “things” reflects one of the most fundamental principles in the Zhuangzian attitude towards language, which lays the foundation for both its criticism later in the text and the unorthodox way language is used in it: words, in this approach, are mere tools, which as such should not be measured by their “truth-value” or “correctness,” but rather by their impact alone.
2. Second, the revolutionary idea regarding the unfixedness of words: while the *Zhuangzi* was certainly not the only text in the Chinese world to discuss the

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<sup>3</sup>Alternatively, it can be read as a factual claim, which would render the criticism more explicit (e.g., “*Saying is not blowing breath, saying says something; the only trouble is that what it says is never fixed.*” Graham 1969: 152).

relationship between words and their referents (normally, “names,” *ming* 名, and “actualities,” *shi* 實, see Makeham 1991), it was probably the first to openly challenge the assumption that there can, or even should, be a “correct” correspondence between the two (D’Ambrosio et al. 2018: 306–313). This critical view of the linguistic mechanism, in turn, enabled some of the authors of the *Zhuangzi* to detach themselves from the sociopolitical context of the period, as it exposes the moral arguments between the various philosophers as a mere game of signs: as stated above, if “right” and “wrong” have no one “true” correspondence in reality, then any moral claim is no more valid than the chirping of birds. From a broader perspective, this view can be also taken as a meta-criticism of the idea of philosophical debate, and to some extent, to use Western terms, of the very notion of “truth.”

3. Finally, the use of the style of writing as another layer of the argument. As a keen observer would note, the interplay between form and content in the above example enabled the author of the text to dodge the above-mentioned problem of self-reference: in contrast to the direct style of the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi* in this passage does not explicitly *state* that words say nothing – an action that would have made it the target of its own criticism – but rather gently pushes the readers towards questioning their former views. Following the dominant reading described above, this maneuver can be regarded as a small-scale demonstration of the Zhuangzian tendency to use indirect argumentation, which supposedly yielded the many parables, fables, allegories, and other “literary” forms that constitute the text. The *Zhuangzi* often refers to “the wordless teaching” (*buyan zhi jiao* 不言之教) (12/5/2, 57/22/7) or “the wordless disputation” (*buyan zhi bian* 不言之辯) (5/2/61, 67/24/68), compliments the sage for his ability to “say something without saying anything” (*wuwei youwei* 無謂有謂) (6/2/74), and recommends “speaking without words” (*yan wuyan* 言無言) (75/27/6); if the indirect argumentation view is correct, it means that the ancient authors conceived those counter-intuitive ideals not as hypothetical notions but rather as actual guiding principles in their work, and thus that their atypical style of writing should be viewed not as the manifestation of some literary brilliance, but, at least partially, as a deliberate attempt to avoid language “per se.”

Inspired by these ideas, many scholars have tried to characterize the unique style of the *Zhuangzi* and the ways it was used to promote the agenda of the text, referring to rhetorical devices such as humor, irony, hyperbole, paradoxes, negation, mythical writing, poetry, emphasizing the grotesque, double-questions, and above all, metaphors (for a partial list, see Allinson 1989a: 14–110; Chong 2006; Kupperman 1989; Møllgaard 2007: 67–84; Schwitzgebel 1996; Slingerland 2004; Wang 2004; Wu 1988; for a detailed discussion of the role of humor in the text, see Moeller, this volume). The exact mechanism behind any of these literary techniques and their assumed impact on the reader vary from one interpreter to another, and it is hard to assess when or to what extent any of them reflected an overall linguistic strategy and not merely a generic or aesthetic preference: after all, early Chinese philosophers were less inclined towards deductive argumentation than their Western counterparts



(Goldin 2020: 13–27), and it is not unusual to find instances of figurative language in works that are usually not accused of advocating a particular antilanguage agenda. There are, however, some noticeable features of the Zhuangzian writing that seem to support the view that it displays as a form of “indirect argumentation”; these “techniques” or “strategies,” however, may be more accurately described not as the exhibition of a specific rhetorical device (such as humor, irony, metaphor, etc.), but rather by the ways in which these devices are used within the text.

## 2.1 *Saying Something Without Saying Anything? Features of the Zhuangzian Indirect Use of Words*

The most relevant feature of the Zhuangzian writing, with respect to the matter at hand, is its notorious **ambiguity**, a linguistic style that has been described by some as a form of writing which aims to obscure rather than reveal the philosophical position of the text (Chiu 2015: 255). Some scholars have referred to the disturbing feeling that the ancient authors wished to fool their interpreters, deliberately preventing them from fixating on one specific view (Hansen 1992: 266; Watson 2013: xxii–xxiii). Others have blamed this ambiguity at least partially on textual corruption (Waley 1982: 200–202; see discussion in Watson 2013: xxv–xxvi). Without committing to questions of intentionality, the final outcome of this style, as attested by the interpretive diversity associated with the text, is the “Rorschach-like” nature of the *Zhuangzi* (Van Norden 1996: 247): a text whose meaning most interpreters feel sure to have understood, while at the same time disagreeing as to what exactly that obvious point is (Hansen 1992: 266).

The “words are not just wind” paragraph demonstrates one of the famous examples of this Zhuangzian tendency to avoid clear-cut statements, the **double-question** form (do words really say something? Or do they say nothing?), which literally replaces a declarative true/false sentence (X is Y) with an open-ended one (Is X really Y? Or is X not Y?) (Allinson 1989a: 25–27; Møllgaard 2007: 71–72). It should be noted, however, that while this linguistic structure is often mentioned as an important feature of the Zhuangzian writing, it rarely appears outside of the second chapter, the *Qiwulun*, which is indeed distinguished from most of the text by its discursive form (Graham 2003a: 63). For most parts of the *Zhuangzi*, the difficulty of extracting a clear-cut doctrine from the text derives from its almost exclusive reliance on **dialogs** and **tales**, two literary devices that were by no means unusual in the world of Chinese thought, but which in the *Zhuangzi* commonly lack the much-needed explanatory notes that elucidate the moral of the allegory (Watson 1983: x). The identities of the speakers are constantly being changed, as if to prevent the reader from spotting the author’s true voice; fictional sages, talking trees, mythical creatures, and anthropomorphized abstracts notions such as “knowledge” or “chaos” all take part in the conversation, when even historical figures like Confucius can appear in one anecdote as a target of ridicule, and in another to play the role of a

Daoist sage (Hansen 1992: 266). The moral, when introduced, is often vague enough to allow several interpretations, so that even allegories whose importance is undisputed, like the anecdote which opens the text, can be subjected to millennia-long discussions about their meaning (Lian 2009).<sup>4</sup> And worst of all, sometimes the characters within the dialog themselves demonstrate their point with yet another uninterpreted allegory or poem, when in at least one case a dazzling triple recursion occurs.<sup>5</sup>

One reason to take these absences of clear-cut messages as reflecting a deliberate attempt to leave things open to interpretation is that in some of these cases, such as the “words are not just wind” paragraph, the inadequacy of language is explicitly discussed in the text. One of the central goals of the *Qiwulun* – as said, the primary source of the famous double-question form – was to criticize the reliance on a strict “right or wrong” (*shifei* 是非) form of argumentation, a state which is brilliantly avoided in the text itself by resorting to open questions rather than conclusive statements. Similarly, two of the anecdotes that involve the highest number of allegories in the text, the dialog between Huizi and *Zhuangzi* in chapter 24 and the dialog between Gongsun Long and Prince Mou of Wei in chapter 17, both discuss the nature of argumentation, and more specifically, the flaws in the analytic method advocated by these prominent logicians compared to *Zhuangzi*’s unbordered use of words.<sup>6</sup>

Besides these “techniques” of leaving things open to interpretation (if that indeed was the authors’ intention), in other cases the text makes use of a more explicitly

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<sup>4</sup>The dispute over the meaning of the Peng allegory goes back at least to the fourth century AD, with Zhi Dun’s (支遁 314–366) absolutist critique of Guo Xiang’s relativistic reading of the tale: while Guo explained that each being should live according to its own nature, either “big” or “small,” the Buddhist Zhi rejected the deterministic tone of this interpretation and held that the giant Peng represents the utmost spiritual development and the little creatures symbolize those who fail to understand his state (Lian 2009; Zürcher 1959: 116–122, 128–129). This example of textual ambiguity is particularly noticeable, as the allegory actually does end with what seems like an explicit moral, “such is the difference between big and little” (Watson 2013: 2; 1/1/16–17); unfortunately, this moral itself is ambiguous enough to allow both interpretations.

<sup>5</sup>In fact, the referenced anecdote, the dialog between *Zhuangzi* and Huizi about the nature of disputation from chapter 24, contains no less than six internal allegories: in the frame narrative, *Zhuangzi* starts by drawing an analogy between archery and disputation (1), temporarily explains it, and then quickly moves to the example of Lu Qu (2), who himself addresses his disciple’s claim about his supposed ability to control temperature with yet another analogy, this time a musical one (3). After Huizi responds to this metaphorical attack, *Zhuangzi* again accuses him of being like the man of Qi who sent his son to Song (4), like someone who seeks out a bell but then muffles its sound (5), or like the man of Chu who skillfully managed to pick a fight with all of his surroundings (6) (66/24/38–48).

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that in these two cases too – similar to the *Qiwulun*, which like them was presumably written as a response to the views associated with Huizi and Gongsun Long – the analytic methods in critique are associated with the use of *shifei* 是非, “right/wrong” or “this/not this.” This search for the “right” answer, which guides the standard mode of disputation, is compared in Huizi’s anecdote to drawing the target after shooting the arrow (see footnote 4), and in Gongsun Long’s anecdote, as a means of comprehending *Zhuangzi*’s words, to a mosquito attempting to carry a mountain on its back or to surveying heaven through a tube (44/17/65–45/17/81).

counter-intuitive style of writing, which relies on the **violation of accepted literary or philosophical conventions**. For example, many anecdotes in the Inner Chapters introduce a person with physical, moral, or mental deformities as their protagonist, in contrast to the common ideal of the period, especially in Confucianism (D'Ambrosio et al. 2018: 312); similarly, in one of the famous dialogs of the outer chapters, Dao is said to be found not only in ants, grass, and tiles, but also in urine and excrement (Watson 2013: 182; 59/22/43–46). According to Burton Watson, this common technique of **valence reversal** reflected the authors' attempt to reject the conventional value of words, "deliberately employing them to mean the opposite of what they ordinarily mean in order to demonstrate their essential meaninglessness" (2013: xxii).<sup>7</sup> This definition is somewhat subjective, of course, and plays on the thin line between counter-intuitive writing and counter-intuitive ideas: after all, claiming that reality is no more real than a dream or that life is not better than death would have a dazzling effect on the reader regardless of whether these sayings were used as exaggerations for rhetorical purposes or as an authentic representation of the authors' unusual views.<sup>8</sup> A clearer case of unconventional use of words, however, is represented by the **paradoxes** and **oxymoronic expressions** that are scattered throughout the text, such as "the use of uselessness" (*wuyong zhi yong* 無用之用) (12/4/90), "the shaded light" (*baoguang* 葆光) (6/2/62), or even the decision to name the unbelievably huge fish in the first line of the text *kun* 鯤 (literally "fish roe," the tiniest speck of fish possible) (1/1/1). While such explicit use of paradoxes is not a common trait in the *Zhuangzi* (at least not compared with the *Laozi* or the known writings of the Mingjia ("School of Names"), two traditions that undoubtedly influenced parts the text),<sup>9</sup> it is interesting to note that many of these **explicit contradictions** that do appear in the text address the topic of language, such as the

<sup>7</sup>It should be noted that humor itself can be taken as a form of violated expectations (McGraw and Warren 2010).

<sup>8</sup>Eric Schwitzgebel, for example, brought up the possibility that even some of the ideas that became strongly associated with the Zhuangzian philosophy might actually have served as a rhetorical means of preventing the reader from taking words too seriously (1996: 73). In the sense that this reading casts doubt on the honesty of the text's claims, the use of counter-intuitivism spills over into the category of ambiguous writing.

<sup>9</sup>The link between the paradoxality of the Mingjia and the *Zhuangzi* is particularly interesting. The second chapter of the text, the *Qiwulun*, contains some of the most famous examples of paradoxical sayings in the *Zhuangzi*, such as "There is nothing in the world bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount Tai is tiny" or "No one has lived longer than a dead child, and Pengzu died young." While these sayings were traditionally considered to be inherently Zhuangzian ideas, A. C. Graham has convincingly shown that they were almost undoubtedly references to the words of the sophist Huizi and were in fact criticized by the author of the text (1969: 138–145). A notable example of this criticism is the direct reference to the seventh of Huizi's ten theses – setting off for Yue today and getting there yesterday – as mentioned in the *Tianxia* chapter: "To fail to abide by this mind and still insist upon your rights and wrongs – this is like saying that you set off for Yue today and got there yesterday. This is to claim that what doesn't exist exists. If you claim that what doesn't exist exists, then even the holy sage Yu couldn't understand you, much less a person like me!" (Watson 2013: 9; 4/2/22). As evidenced from the text, the author clearly uses the paradox as an example of an absurd and flawed idea (see footnote 23).

earlier mentioned “wordless argument”, “speaking non-speech”, “having said something without saying anything”, or even, similarly to the first chapter of the *Laozi*, “the unspoken Dao” (5/2/61). This fact strengthens the possibility that at least these cases reflect a deliberate attempt to avoid “direct” language or to demonstrate the futility of words. Finally, moving to the larger scale of linguistic use, another example of counter-intuitive writing is the **violation of narrative expectations**, a technique in which the author seems to set the scene for a certain scenario and then departs from it in an unexpected way; this technique, however, is usually not addressed as such, although it is used in one way or another in many anecdotes of the *Zhuangzi*, including some of the more memorable passages in the Inner Chapters of the text.<sup>10</sup>

In psycholinguistic terms, most of the rhetorical devices that are commonly associated with the Zhuangzian writing (humor, irony, metaphor, paradox, poetic writing, etc.) fall under the category of “non-literal language”; namely, language that does not use the standard denotations of words and thus violates the “standard” rules of discourse (Ariel 2002: 263–263). As Wang Youru rightfully notes, however, a truly instrumentalist view of language would inevitably eliminate the distinction between the “literal” and “figurative” use of words, as it measures every speech act based solely on its impact on the reader, and not on the truth-value of what has been explicitly said (2004: 203). While it would be hard to conclusively point to the use of any specific rhetorical device as reflecting a calculated linguistic strategy, their proportion within the text and its overall ambiguity support the possibility that at least some of them did reflect a deliberate attempt to avoid the standard “X is Y” type of statements which characterize more direct types of argumentation: while the use of questions (Is X Y?) and literary masks (Z said that X is Y) prevent the interpreter from narrowing the text to one single view, techniques such as contradictions (X is not X) and valence reversal shake the readers out of their dogmatic presumptions, and make them re-evaluate their former views. One way or another, the final outcome is a text which is as challenging to analyze as it is enjoyable to read: not

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<sup>10</sup> The first anecdote of the text, for example, opens with a long and vivid portrayal of the giant bird and its extensive size, which depicts it as the protagonist of a mythical tale (Allinson 1989a: 41–42); before its story takes form, however, the focus shifts sharply to the shabby swamp-dwellers who laugh at the Peng and its pointlessly oversized journey, quickly turning what seemed at first to be the exposition of a myth into an allegorical comparison. Regardless of the final moral of the allegory (see footnote 4), this break of generic rules alone has its own impact on the reader, who realizes even from this early stage of her encounter with the *Zhuangzi* that she will not be able to rely on standard literary norms when reading the text.

Another example of this technique can be found in the allusion to the sophistry of the Mingjia 名家 in the second chapter: after introducing what seems like a highly sophisticated paradox (“There is a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning,” and so forth, (Watson 2013: 12–13; 5/2/49–50)) and almost inevitably throwing the reader into a mind-bending attempt to decode the argument, the author suddenly renounces his temporary sophist identity and bluntly asks whether what he has just said actually says anything or not. Ironically, the presentation of this mock sophistry was so convincing that it overshadowed its final ridicule, resulting in later attempts to analyze the text as a serious cosmogenic description (Puett 2000; Roth 2010: 78–79, 84–86).

only can many statements in the *Zhuangzi* be subjected to multiple interpretations, but it is also possible that this inconclusiveness was at least partially deliberate, casting doubt on the interpreter's ability to ever know whether a certain reading is the right one or not. As some scholars have suggested, however, one may also claim that this interpretative problem lies not in the *Zhuangzi* itself, but rather in the attempt to impose one "right" reading on the text which, to begin with, wished to free its readers from the need to rely on any certain "right" or "wrong" (Wu 1982: 14–23).

## 2.2 *Self-Acknowledged Ambiguity*

The "indirect argumentation" reading of the *Zhuangzi* provides a parsimonious account of its stylistic uniqueness, which neatly ties together the Zhuangzian attitude towards language and the unusual way in which language is used in the text. Presumably, the ancient authors doubted the ability of words to convey the true essence of things, and consequently employed various techniques that allowed them to bypass language "per se," resulting in the ambiguous, stylistically unique text we have today. Despite the elegance of this solution, however, one cannot ignore alternative explanations for the Zhuangzian lack of clarity, first and foremost the fact that the text is a multi-layered anthology that was edited at least twice before taking its current form, and which as such has probably undergone a substantial amount of textual mutilation (Klein 2011; Bumbacher 2016). Worse still, even if we do assume that all of the authors who took part in the compilation of the *Zhuangzi* were equally committed to the ideal of performative, indirect writing – an improbable assumption, considering the much clearer style of some parts of the text – it would still be unlikely to think that they all shared the exact same literary techniques and, no less importantly, an equal amount of literary talent. Despite these counter-arguments, however, the idea of deliberately indirect writing is supported by one more important fact, which indicates that the ambiguity of the *Zhuangzi* could not have been entirely the result of textual mutilation or insufficient context: the sayings of *Zhuangzi* (or more generally of the Zhuangzian sage) are described as strange and hard to comprehend even *within the text itself*, showing that this aspect of the Zhuangzian teaching was at least acknowledged, if not embraced, from the earliest stages of its formation.

First, some anecdotes more generally address the language of the sage, which is then often characterized as strange and disturbing. Jie Yu, the madman of Chu, is described in the first chapter as using "big and non-corresponsive" words (*da er wudang* 大而無當) which "never come near human affairs," and terrify their hearer (2/1/27–28); the fantastic description of the sage's deeds (who, among others, "speaks without speaking") is said in the second chapter to have potentially confused even the Yellow Emperor himself, and is dismissed by Confucius as rude and careless (6/2/75–76); and Zhang Wuzi, the protagonist of the same dialog, depicts his own sayings as "reckless" (*wangyan* 妄言) and urges his interlocutor to absorb

them with an equally “reckless” type of listening (*wangting* 妄聽) (6/2/77). While this use of bizarre language is not explicitly attributed to the text itself, in all of these cases the author also mentions the content of these marvellous and uncanny sayings, and thus implicitly places the reader in the same position as the confused and terrified hearers of those sagely words: when Zhang Wuzi states that reality is nothing but a big dream, therefore, the real addressee of his “reckless” speech is not his interlocutor in the dialog, but rather the actual readers of the text; the fact that dismissing these weird sayings is condemned in the text as a marker of intellectual blindness (2/1/30–31) or analytical impatience (6/2/76) only emphasizes this point, as if challenging the readers to embrace such “reckless” mode of reading themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Second, moving a little closer to self-referentiality, in several cases the text explicitly attributes the use of ambiguous and unusual language to *Zhuangzi* himself or to his writing. The *Tianxia* (天下), the last chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, provides a retrospective account of six groups of philosophers, including Mozi and his disciples, Lao Dan and Guan Yin, Huizi and the logicians, and Zhuang Zhou himself. This valuable document of pre-Qin intellectual history, the most detailed among the early descriptions of Zhuang Zhou and his views, already describes him as “veiled and arcane ... one who has never been completely comprehended,” and draws a sharp distinction between his “absurd expressions, extravagant words, and unbordered phrases” and the straightforward language from which he presumably refrained (Mair 1994: 343; 93/33/62–39). Similarly, in the dialog that ends the first chapter, Zhuangzi (this time as a character) is explicitly accused by the logician Huizi of using “big and useless words,” like a twisted-brunched tree that cannot be measured by any tool of carpentry and is therefore left unused; Zhuangzi, needless to say, does not respond directly to this criticism, but instead, as if to further demonstrate Huizi’s point, remains in the realm of metaphors and suggests his friend plant this useless tree in the “field of Broad-and-Boundless” and rest by its side (Watson 2013: 6; 3/1/42–47).

An interesting point regarding the last anecdote is that the divergence into metaphor it describes – supposedly a performative demonstration of Zhuangzi’s “big and useless” words – actually portrays a recurring theme within the text, a fact that can teach us about the image of Zhuang Zhou as it was conceived in the earlier stages of

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<sup>11</sup> Another example of the idea of “alternative listening” appears in Confucius’s advice to Yen Hui in the fourth chapter: “*Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your mind (xin 心). No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit (qi 氣). Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits for all things*” (Watson 2013: 2–13: 25; 9/4/26–28). Some scholars have developed this point, suggesting that the *Zhuangzi* requires a special, non-analytical kind of reading; see, for example, Burton Watson’s overall impression of the text: “*In the end, the best way to approach Zhuangzi, I believe, is not to attempt to subject his thought to rational and systematic analysis, but to read and reread his words until one has ceased to think of what he is saying and instead has developed an intuitive sense of the mind moving behind the words, and of the world in which it moves*” (Watson 2013: xiii; see also Wu 1982: 36, and Møllgaard 2020: 378, on the need to *experience* Zhuangzi’s nonsensical language rather than immediately trying to make sense out of it).



the Zhuangzian tradition. Of the 25 anecdotes in the *Zhuangzi* in which Zhuangzi himself appears as a character, in 15 he resorts to elaborate allegories, often in a way that suppresses the actual frame narrative, and in another three he uses wordplay, metaphors, or poems to convey his views. In the one anecdote in which Zhuangzi appears not as a character but rather as the subject of the conversation – the dialog between the logician Gongsun Long and Prince Mou of Wei – the topic is his strange and bewildering sayings, which cannot be comprehended by the former despite his own mastery of words. Among the four cases in which Zhuangzi is mentioned only as the source of a saying (“Zhuangzi said”), one involves the use of paradoxes, one responds to an allegory, and one discusses the value of not speaking (*buyan* 不言) about Dao. Including his above-mentioned description in the *Tianxia* chapter, therefore, Zhuangzi’s unusual and complicated use of words is either addressed or demonstrated (or both) in more than two-thirds of his explicit mentions in the text (23 out of 31), **making it one of the most consistent features of the Zhuangzian philosophy as introduced in the *Zhuangzi* text.**<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the most explicit reference in the *Zhuangzi* to its own unique style of writing is found at the beginning of chapter 27, *yuyan* 寓言 (Watson: “imputed words”, Mair: “metaphors”, Ziporyn: “words lodged elsewhere”), which according to most interpreters overtly discusses the different modes of discourse that constitute the language of the text (75/27/1–10). There have been many suggestions regarding the exact meaning of these linguistic strategies and the way in which they were employed in the *Zhuangzi* – including in this volume – and I will therefore not review them here (for elaboration, see Lin 1994; Wang 2004; Wu 1988; Fried, 2022). There are, however, two important points for our matter: first, as long as we assume that this short text did refer to the *Zhuangzi* (or at least to significant parts of it),<sup>13</sup> it means that its style was considered special enough to justify a direct, self-referential discussion of that sort. Second, without committing to the exact kind of literary masks discussed in this text, at least its first part seems like the author’s (or someone writing from the author’s point of view) honest admission of deliberately concealing his explicit message, at least in certain cases: “*These imputed words that*

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<sup>12</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume that many – if not all – of the anecdotes in the text that feature Zhuangzi himself are apocryphal, and mainly reflect the image of Zhuangzi as conceived by their authors or to the ideal of the Zhuangzian sage. Whether this image was inspired by a certain historical Zhuang Zhou or was gradually formed by the association of certain texts with his name, the important point is that this stylistic aspect of the Zhuangzian teaching – the extensive use of allegories and strange words – was infused into the image of Zhuangzi early enough to become as inseparable from it as its philosophy itself.

<sup>13</sup> An alternative and less plausible scenario is that the beginning of chapter 27 was written as an appendix to a completely different text, which itself was not included in the finalized *Zhuangzi*. Since the name Zhuangzi/Zhuang Zhou is not mentioned anywhere in this short passage, this scenario cannot be ruled out completely; however, the same three types of speech discussed in it are explicitly attributed to Zhuang Zhou in the *Tianxia* chapter, suggesting that this text was taken to refer to the Zhuangzian writing at least by the author of this (probably later) chapter (for discussion, including the possible relation between the beginning of chapter 27 and the *Qiwulun*, see Fried, 2022).



*make up nine-tenths of it are like persons brought in from outside for the purpose of exposition. A father does not act as go-between for his own son because the praises of the father would not be as effective as the praises of an outsider. It is the fault of other men, not mine; they would respond only to what agrees with their own views and reject what does not, would pronounce 'right' what agrees with their own views and 'wrong' what does not*" (Watson 2013: 234.). While this specific type of writing is said to be used for simple persuasion purposes (and not as some form of a more profound critique of language), please note that it is still described as an attempt to cunningly alter the reader's point of view without explicitly revealing the author's intention, thus exposing one of the major sources of the Zhuangzian ambiguity – the use of uninterpreted literary masks – as indeed deliberate.

The important observation that can be drawn from these references to the use of language is that despite any textual mutilation that may have (and probably had) taken place, the Zhuangzian philosophy was characterized by its ambiguity and unusual language from the earliest stages of its formation, and was probably considered difficult to understand even by its very first followers. The depiction of Zhuang Zhou's sayings as incomprehensible in the *Tianxia* chapter is particularly striking, since, as some scholars have suggested, it is possible that this chapter was written by the original compilers of the text (Graham 1989a: 256–257).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the fact that some of these passages specify the motivation behind the use of this anomalous style further supports the view of it as a deliberate attempt to avoid straightforward language, and not the unintentional side effect of an unusual literary choice: the *Tianxia* explains that Zhuang Zhou "*believed that the world was drowned in turbidness and that it was impossible to address it in sober language*" (Watson 2013: 296). The dialog that ends the first chapter metaphorically hints at the philosophical risk of using "useful" words, comparing Huizi's direct language to a wild-cat that ignores its surroundings and aims directly at its prey, but consequently falls in a hunter's trap and dies. Most interesting of all, however, is the motivation behind the use of the mysterious "goblet words" as appears in chapter 27, which have been suggested by some scholars to represent the general stance towards the use of language in the text (Wang 1988: 1090–1091):

When nothing is said, everything is equal. But words and this original equality are then not equal to each other. Thus it is that I speak only nonspeech. When you speak nonspeech, you can talk all your life without ever having said a word, or never utter a sound without ever failing to say something. (Ziporyn 2009: 114; 75/27/5–6)

Many scholars regard the attainment of equality as one of the main goals of the Zhuangzian philosophy; the sharp contrast between "equality" (*qi* 齊) and "words/speaking" (*yan* 言), in this respect, points to a fundamental problem associated with language, which serves as the main motivation behind the avoidance of direct

<sup>14</sup>In fact, about one-third of the passage that is dedicated to Zhuang Zhou in the *Tianxia* chapter focuses on his atypical use of language, a fact that shows the impact his unique style had on the early readers. Except for Huizi and other Mingjia thinkers, who are condemned for their paradoxical claims, the style of no other "school" among the six mentioned in the text (including the Laozian school) receives any attention.

words – “speaking nonspeech,” in the text’s own terms. As will be further elaborated in the next part of the paper, however, much like almost any other topic discussed in the *Zhuangzi*, the precise nature of this problem – what exactly is wrong with language – is also far from being conclusive.

### 3 What Is Wrong with Language? Breaking Loose from the Tyranny of Unitary Reading

The Zhuangzian attitude toward language is often analyzed in the broader context of early Daoist philosophy, which indeed seemed to demonstrate a distinct mistrust in words (Graham 1989a: 25; Ivanhoe 1993: 639–640). “*The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way*” (Lau 1982: 3) and “*those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know*” (Lau 1982: 81; Watson 2013: 106) are just two of the many manifestations of this critical approach, which yielded many other Daoist catchphrases such as the *wordless teaching* (Lau 1982: 5, 65; Watson 2013: 34, 177), the *name is only the guest of reality* (Watson 2013: 3), the *awareness that precedes words* (Roth 1999: 72), and, with a little more theoretical elaboration, some of the more memorable passages of the *Zhuangzi*. As briefly shown earlier, this general idea of a “Daoist mistrust in words” provides a convenient framework for looking at this shared trait, as well as an efficient explanation for the literary style that characterizes some of the Daoist works: presumably, faithful to their belief in the inadequacy of words, the ancient thinkers tried to avoid language “per se,” paraphrasing their arguments in an indirect manner that supposedly enabled them to bypass the standard use of words.

While this generalization is certainly true to some extent, it also carries the danger of ignoring the diversity within what is now referred to as the Daoist school.<sup>15</sup> This danger becomes especially acute in the case of the *Zhuangzi*, a text which is consensually agreed to represent the work of at least several groups of authors who, although might have held similar ideas in some respects, surely did not share the same worldview: some parts of the text enthusiastically quote from the *Laozi*, condemn Confucian moralism as the source of all evil, and suggest retreating to a pre-cultural society free of classes and hierarchies; others praise the wisdom of Confucian teaching, embrace the existing social order, and explain why conventional hierarchies such as ruler–subject or men–women are the natural order of

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, the idea of “early Daoism” can be criticized, in that respect, on three different bases: first, the anachronism of the category of “philosophical schools” when applied to the Warring States Period, including, of course, the category of Daoism itself (Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan 2003); second, as will be further elaborated in this section, the separation of the *Zhuangzi* itself into several “sub-schools” of Daoism (Graham 1989a; Liu 1994); and third, the possible disconnection between at least the core of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi* text, as was suggested by some scholars on historical (Graham 1990; 1989b: 170–172) and philosophical (Hansen 1992: 269–272, 285–292) grounds.

things. Relying on such apparent contradictions, previous attempts to layer the text referred to noticeable differences regarding morality, politics, nature, and the attitude towards other schools of thought (see Graham 1989a; Hoffert 2002; Liu 1994; Roth 1991). The different approaches to language, however, have largely been ignored in past studies, despite the varieties of views regarding this topic as well.

Consider, for example, the following anecdotes, two of the most famous examples of the Zhuangzian mistrust in words:

Duke Huan was in his hall reading a book. The wheelwright Pian, who was in the yard below chiseling a wheel, laid down his mallet and chisel, stepped up into the hall, and said to Duke Huan, “This book Your Grace is reading—may I venture to ask whose words are in it?” “The words of the sages,” said the duke. “Are the sages still alive?” “Dead long ago,” said the duke. “In that case, what you are reading there is nothing but the chaff and dregs of the men of old!” “Since when does a wheelwright have permission to comment on the books I read?” said Duke Huan. “If you have some explanation, well and good. If not, it’s your life!” Wheelwright Pian said, “I look at it from the point of view of my own work. When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too gentle, the chisel will slide and won’t take hold. But if they’re too hard, it will bite and won’t budge. Not too gentle, not too hard—you can get it in your hand and feel it in your mind. You can’t put it into words, and yet there’s a knack to it somehow. I can’t teach it to my son, and he can’t learn it from me. So I’ve gone along for seventy years, and at my age I’m still chiseling wheels. When the men of old died, they took with them the things that couldn’t be handed down. So what you are reading there must be nothing but the chaff and dregs of the men of old.” (Watson 2013: 106–107; 36/13/68–74)

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you’ve gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you’ve gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him? (Watson 2013: 233; 75/26/48–49)

As I have suggested elsewhere (Porat 2015: 118–120), while both of these highly quoted passages – which are commonly cited as examples of the Zhuangzian attitude towards language – certainly demonstrate *some* criticism of words, a closer look reveals that their views of language and the problem associated with it differ greatly. The first anecdote, the wheelwright story, points to what seems to be a fatal flaw in the linguistic mechanism, at least with regard to its descriptive function: words simply cannot capture the true essence of things (or at least the important points within a given teaching), a fairly strong criticism which corresponds well with the Laozian theory of ineffability; this link is further emphasized by the quotation from *Laozi* 56 that ends the previous and closely related anecdote about the futility of books, “those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know” (36/13/64–68). The second anecdote, on the other hand, does not associate any apparent problem with the linguistic mechanism, and in fact implicitly depicts it as essential for its role: in the same way that rabbit snares and fishing nets are needed in order to catch prey, words are needed in order to grasp meanings; words may be forgotten, but only *after* their goal has been fulfilled. Unlike the fundamental rejection of words as a valid tool in the first example, this gentle reminder to focus on the meanings and not on their verbal carriers seems much easier to digest, and does not require any considerable changes in one’s linguistic behavior; correspondingly,

unlike the more Daoist or “Laoist” tone of the wheelwright story, the fish trap analogy can easily be linked to other trends of thought in ancient China (Lin 1994: 56), and could equally have appeared in non-Chinese contexts as well.

The fish trap analogy, therefore, explicitly states that words are the means by which meaning is conveyed (言者所以在意). The anecdote that precedes the wheelwright story, on the other hand, and in a way serves as its introduction, states that what meaning depends on cannot be conveyed by words (意之所隨者, 不可以言傳也). Those differences do not entail, of course, that there is no possible way of reading the two anecdotes as representing the same worldview – for example, by suggesting an alternative reading of the fish trap analogy as conveying a more radical message than the one that actually appears in the text.<sup>16</sup> The mere fact that one can do so, however, does not mean that one should: whether we accept the suggested division of the text as reconstructed by some scholars (Graham 1989a; Liu 1994) or we believe that its original layers are interwoven beyond repair, there is no doubt that the *Zhuangzi* in its current form gathers several voices which disagreed about important principles; there is no reason to believe, therefore, that in their attitude towards language in particular, these different authors shared the exact same worldview. In the following sections I will address three major forms of the problem, all of which have been discussed by scholars of the *Zhuangzi* in the past.

### 3.1 The Problem of Ineffability

The simplest and most commonly addressed form of the problem is that of ineffability; namely, the idea that certain aspects of reality – particularly those in which the thinkers are most interested – cannot be put into words. As William James had already noted, this view was shared by many mystical writers throughout history, in Eastern and Western thought alike (James 1958: 292–93; see also Gellman 2019; Scharfstein 1993). The prominent example in the Chinese context, however, is undoubtedly the theme of the ineffable Dao in the *Laozi*, which is mentioned in the very first line of the text: “the way that can be spoken of is not the constant way”

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<sup>16</sup> Hans-George Moeller, for example, suggests that the fish trap analogy entails not only that words should be abandoned, but also the meanings themselves (2000). This suggestion is notable in that it acknowledges the commonly overlooked inconsistency between the standard reading of the anecdote and other parts of the *Zhuangzi*; however, Moeller takes this inconsistency not as evidence of authorial disunity, but rather as an argument against the standard reading of the text. It should be noted that Moeller addresses the possibility of multiple sources, and further supports his argument by relying on Guo Xiang’s commentary and the interpretation of “getting the meaning” as a play on words; while these suggestions are perfectly plausible, it seems that giving up on the attempt to extract one coherent view from the text may provide a simpler solution for this inconsistency.

(Lau 1982: 3), and thus, deducibly, the constant way cannot be spoken of.<sup>17</sup> An important point regarding this particular form of the problem is that it restricts the criticism to a very specific case of verbal use: as long as one wishes to discuss worldly affairs such as the weather or simple arithmetic, language seems to work just fine; the problem only arises when one wishes to speak about the true essence of reality, the direct experience associated with it, or the way to attain this unique state.

Considering its prominence in the *Laozi* and its strong association even in the text itself with the discussion about the imperceptible Dao, there are reasons to believe that the theme of ineffability did not originate independently in the *Zhuangzi*, but was rather inspired by external “Daoist” ideas.<sup>18</sup> It is rarely mentioned as a problem in the Inner Chapters (which, indeed, contain no direct references to the *Laozi* text),<sup>19</sup> and is not listed among the reasons to employ indirect language in the famous three *yan* 言’s passage that opens chapter 27, which are commonly associated with the *Qiwulun* and with the writing of Zhuang Zhou himself (see Fried, 2022). Despite its relative absence from those distinctively “Zhuangzian” parts of the text, however, some of the chapters that were attributed by Graham and Liu to the direct successors of Zhuang Zhou (Graham 1989a: 116–194; Liu 1994: 89–121) present elaborated discussions on the matter that can hardly be found in more concise works of Daoism such as the *Laozi* or the *Guanzi*’s four *Xinshu* chapters, and significantly develop their protean ideas. Chapter 25, for example, presents a long dialog between “Little Knowledge” (*xiaozhi* 少知) and “Great Impartial Accord” (*taigongdiao* 太公調) in which the latter explains that the ineffability of Dao results from its intrinsic detachment from the world of “things”:

That which words (言) can adequately describe, that which understanding (知) can reach to, extends only as far as the level of “things” (物), no further. The man who looks to the Way (道) does not try to track down what has disappeared, does not try to trace the source of what springs up. This is the point at which debate comes to a stop.... You can talk about it, you can think about it; but the more you talk about it, the further away you get from it. (Watson 2013: 225; 73/25/72–77)

<sup>17</sup> Since “Dao” can be read both as a noun and a verb, an alternative translation that would deemphasize the problem of ineffability would be “*Dao that can be ‘Daoed’*” (“walked,” “guided,” etc.) instead of “*Dao that can be spoken of*” (see, for example, Cleary 1991: 9; Mair 1990: 59). Considering the next line, however – “*a name that can be named is not the constant name*” – it is hard to believe that the meaning of “speaking” was not meant to be at least implied.

<sup>18</sup> As suggested by Harold Roth and others, the *Laozi* itself might have represented a broader “Laoist” or “proto-Daoist” tradition, traces of which can be found in the four *xinshu* chapters of the *Guanzi* and other related texts (Baxter 1998: 240–243, 249; Roth 1999: 173–203). While the *Laozi* clearly places the most emphasis on the ineffability of the absolute, similar references can be found in the *Neiye* and the *Xinshu* chapters (e.g., Roth 1999: 56–57 (VI), suggesting that this particular feature of Dao originated in a very early period, possibly (relying on the assumed shared origin of these texts) even before the fourth century BC.

<sup>19</sup> Graham took this lack of Laozian quotations and references to Laozi himself as one of the arguments for the chronological priority of the Inner Chapters (2003a: 67–68, 72). The Inner Chapters do mention “old Dan” 老聃 on three occasions (one of them in his own funeral), but these can hardly be taken as a conclusive indication of any familiarity with the *Laozi* text.

As the text explains, even the term “Dao” itself is somewhat misleading, since it falsely depicts its referent as belonging to the world of phenomena, as if the relationship between things and Dao is comparable to the relationship between a dog and a horse; unlike other “big” entities such as heaven, earth, and even the Yin and Yang, Dao is all-encompassing (224; 25/66–69), and therefore has no name (223; 25/63–64). While the “Little Knowledge” dialog still relies on fantastic characters as spokesmen for its argument (and therefore formally follows the literary conventions of the *Zhuangzi*), it presents a relatively straightforward, almost analytic argument, and thus largely departs from the ambiguous style that characterizes other parts of the text. The authors of chapter 22, on the other hand, which generally adheres more to the irrational aspect of the Daoist teaching (Graham 1989a: 158–169, Hoffert 2006), seem to have taken a more performative approach. In the first episode, “Knowledge” (*zhi* 知)<sup>20</sup> tries to gain a better understanding of Dao and the means to attain it, by addressing three potential guides: First, it approaches “Do-Nothing-Say-Nothing” (*wuweiwei* 無為謂), which, in line with its name, does not respond to any of Knowledge’s questions. Then, it approaches “Wild-and-Witless” (*kuangqu* 狂屈), which, on beginning its response, forgets what it wanted to say. Eventually, Knowledge brings its questions to the Yellow Emperor, who provides the following answers:

Only when there is no pondering and no cogitation will you get to know the Way. Only when you have no surroundings and follow no practices will you find rest in the Way. Only when there is no path and no procedure can you get to the Way. (Watson 2013: 176; 57/22/6)

The emperor’s reply is in line with the “negative” depiction of Dao that appears in *Laozi* 48 (Lau 1982: 69), one of the four Laozian quotations that are incorporated into his reply: “He who practices the Way does less every day, does less and goes on doing less until he reaches the point where he does nothing” (177; 22/9). The interesting point for our matter is that at this stage of the episode, Knowledge continues by asking the Yellow Emperor who among the four participants had the correct conception of Dao, a question that might seem odd outside of the Daoist context, considering that the first two recipients did not reply at all. The emperor, however, provides the following reply, which ends with two more Laozian quotations, from chapters 56 and 2 respectively (Lau 1982: 81, 5):

Do-Nothing-Say-Nothing – he’s the one who is truly right. Wild-and-Witless appears to be so. But you and I in the end are nowhere near it. “Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know.” Therefore the sage “practices the teaching that has no words.” (Watson 2013: 177; 22/6–7)

<sup>20</sup> Please note that while “little knowledge” and “knowledge” may sound similar, the symbolic meaning behind these protagonists’ names might actually reflect a completely different worldview: in the more rationalistic “little knowledge” dialog, the student-like figure, in line with its name, wishes to gain more knowledge about the Way, a wish which is granted in the form of a relatively analytic explanation; on the other hand, in the “Knowledge wondered North” tale (the first sentence of the dialog, which granted chapter 22 its name), the main moral is that analytic, verbal knowledge – the one “Knowledge” manifests, presumably – is not sufficient to gain true understanding of the Way.



As mentioned earlier, the first line of the *Laozi* introduces an intrinsic paradox: by verbally describing Dao and at the same time disqualifying all of its verbal descriptions for not dealing with “the real thing,” the text implicitly disqualifies its own description as well. Please note that the emperor’s reply to Knowledge does not only follow the Laozian idea of the ineffable Way, but also replicates the same problem of self-referentiality: How should we treat the sayings of a speaker who explicitly announces that his words have no validity? The fact that Dao was already explicitly depicted as imperceptible in the emperor’s first reply, alongside the fact that the same message could have been conveyed without this paradoxical self-negation, suggests that the main role of this addition was performative: while the reader is bound to reject the Emperor’s description of Dao – the only one given to her – as being “nowhere near it,” she can still extract the important observation according to which one should not confuse the mere description of Dao (as in the emperor’s reply) and its real understanding (which is essentially wordless). Claims such as “the Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant Dao” or “those who speak do not know” leave the paradox intact; the Zhuangzian decision to demonstrate the point through a dialog, on the other hand, reminds the readers that simply *reading* the text will gain them no real understanding of what Dao truly means.

### 3.2 *Language Distances Us from Our True Nature*

Another important principle of the Zhuangzian philosophy, which in turn may lead to a completely different criticism of language, is the striving for simplicity or authenticity by “cleaning up” the artificial surplus men have added to the world. The heuristic of reduction or negation, as in the approach of “doing less and less” described by the Yellow Emperor, served as a key principle of early Daoism and a distinct feature of its somewhat counter-intuitive philosophy; the idealization of non-doing (*wuwei* 無為), not-desiring (*wuyu* 無欲), forgetting (*wang* 忘), or any of the many other “negative” ideals that are scattered throughout the texts are all examples of this fundamental principle, as well as the depiction of Dao itself as a formless and nameless emptiness that can only be experienced by a process of conceptual elimination. In most parts of the *Zhuangzi*, however, the text seems to aim not towards some sort of abstract unity or featureless void, but rather towards the very concrete and simpler state of being *within* the world, which would allow one to manifest one’s authentic nature and experience things without the mask of cultural imprints. Social hierarchies, conventional norms, learned morality, and abstract sophistry are all examples of these unnatural elements that need to be wiped out in order to restore the long-lost “knack of living,” as well as our tendency to impose value judgments on the world (Graham 1989a: 25). Language, in this respect, is considered not only as one of those artificial surpluses, but also as one of the main tools by which those elements were constructed in the first place: by granting us the ability to build theories and meta-reflect about reality, it opens a gap between man and nature, and thus suppresses our spontaneous being in the world (Shang 2006:



37). It is worth noting that while this naturalistic approach became associated with the Daoist philosophy in general, the criticism that it raises against language is completely independent of the Laozian problem of ineffability: first, the assumption that language or overly conscious thinking prevent us from seeing the world in its full clarity does not require any metaphysical presuppositions, and as such can be advocated independently of the belief in Dao. Second, while the unmediated state of being or the spontaneous act that derives from it are indeed ineffable (as demonstrated by the story of wheelwright Pian), the naturalistic criticism focuses not on the *descriptive* function of words, but rather treats language itself as a praxis, a sort of “bad habit” people tend to embrace that affects their behavior in the world.

The idealization of non-verbal entities such as infants or animals (Moeller 2008: 118–119) is related to this type of criticism, as well as the condemnation of empty sophistry that recurs throughout the text. In certain chapters, mainly the ones that Graham classified as the “primitivist” essays (1989a: 195–217), this striving for authenticity takes the form of a socio-political critique, which focuses not on language in general, but rather on the moralistic attempt to educate the people: “*To diverge into disputation balances tile on tile and ties the cord in knots, chiselling phrases and hammering sentences to make the heart stray among questions about ‘the hard and the white,’ ‘the same and the different,’ and fatuously admire useless propositions*” (Graham 1989a: 200; 21/8/6–7). Just as a horse trainer commits a crime against the horse’s untamed nature and a potter against the unshapen nature of the clay (23/9/18–24), so too the philosopher and the moralist commit a crime against the unbiased nature of human beings, teaching them to reflect upon and judge the world and thus tearing them away from the state of blissful ignorance (9/14–19). Considering the historical context, the prominent targets of this criticism were probably the Confucians and the Mohists, who, despite their opposing stances, both referred to language as a tool of regulation in their attempts to construct social order (Møllgaard 2007: 70); placing things in a broader perspective, one may also claim that language is not only the means of establishing a normative set of behaviors, but also serves as a kind of ritual itself (Berkson 1996: 100), so that breaking free of the conventional values of words is just one step towards the rejection of conventional values as a whole (Watson 2013: xxii).

A more individualistic example of this naturalistic approach is reflected in the many “knack stories” that appear throughout the text, and demonstrate the manifestation of spontaneity by employing “earthly” skills such as wood-carving, cicada-catching, meat-cutting, and so forth (Ivanhoe 1993). An important feature of this mode of being, which is further enhanced by its identification with the state of “flow” in Western psychology (Barret 2011), is that it is not intellectual, and furthermore, that conscious thinking – and thus, vicariously, verbal thinking – can actually interfere with its attainment (Ivanhoe 1993: 650–651). “*When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew one another with moisture and wet one another down with spit*” (Watson 2013: 44, 115; 39/14/60, 16/6/22–23), just as philosophers who find themselves outside of the stream of nature try to compensate for their lost intuitions by desperately explaining their wisdom. The true experience of this state of “being in the moment” is something that one can hold in

one's hand and feel in one's mind, but, as wheelwright Pian explains, it cannot be delivered by words (36/13/72).

In a certain respect, this depiction of language as something that adds an unnecessary complexity to the world reflects the contrast between the concrete aspects of being (playing music, looking at swimming fish, etc.) and the role of language as the main vehicle of abstractness; the gap between names (*ming* 名) and reality (*shi* 實), accordingly, parallels the gap between things "as they truly are" and their symbolic representation, the "second coding" people tend to impose on the world (Moeller 2008: 120). The Zhuangzian observation that "names are just the guests of reality" (2/1/25), according to this view, reminds us not to act on this abstract, detached level: animals and infants do not build theories about how they *should* act or what they are *supposed* to be; instead, being unbound by verbal reflection, they simply act according to their innate nature (*xing* 性), or simply are so of themselves (*ziran* 自然), traits that most of us have lost.

### 3.3 The Relativistic View

The above readings refer to certain ideals towards which the text presumably wished to guide us; in particular, the ineffable monist principle which underlies all phenomena, or the simple and authentic being in the world. According to a different interpretive approach, which is mainly built on the perspectivist tone of the *Qiwulun* and some related passages within the text, the very notion of following one particular ideal was exactly the error from which the *Zhuangzi* wished to save us. This view attributes the text with a strong relativistic or at least agnostic standpoint, which opposes clinging to any point of view and consequently to any particular system of "right" and "wrong" (*shifei* 是非). The problem with language, in that respect, is intrinsic to the way propositions work: most statements – especially "philosophical" ones – presuppose the existence of a certain state of affairs ("today is Tuesday," "this animal is a horse," etc.) and thus implicitly negate others ("today is Monday," "this animal is not a horse," etc.). The relativist, on the other hand, assumes no such "right" state of affairs, only different perspectives, each dividing the world according to its own language scheme; following any verbal claim of that sort, therefore, would inevitably lead us, according to this view, to a partial understanding of reality.<sup>21</sup> In a way, this is the diametrical opposite of the naturalist criticism: language does not add unnecessary complexity to the world, but rather, on the contrary, it promotes a false picture of simplicity by excluding most possible alternatives. I might say that a certain X is a horse and that the Mohist view represents the supreme understanding, while my friend might say that this X is a cow and that the Confucians had it right all along; in fact, these are just two possible ways of dividing the world

<sup>21</sup> This is, of course, a simplified description of the relativist view; for a detailed overview of the different types of relativism that were attributed to the *Zhuangzi*, see Allinson 1989b.

into language claims, but our tendency to fixate on only one verbal meaning at a time masks the fact that actually, both of us are equally right. Corresponding to its type of criticism, this view attacks not so much language itself, but rather the attempt to capture the one “true” system of rights and wrongs that would provide an accurate description of reality, the notorious *bian* 辯 (literally, “distinguish,” “discriminate”) that was heavily criticized in some parts of the text; as a philosophical heuristic, this method of argumentation was associated with the later Mohists (Fraser 2018) and the school of names, but seems to serve in the *Zhuangzi* as a metonym for the philosophical debate as a whole:

Suppose you and I have had an argument. If you have beaten me instead of my beating you, then are you necessarily right and am I necessarily wrong? If I have beaten you instead of your beating me, then am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I don’t know the answer, then other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide what is right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who agrees with me? But if he already agrees with me, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he decide? Obviously, then, neither you nor I nor anyone else can decide for each other. Shall we wait for still another person? (Watson 2013: 17; 7/2/84–90)

While the writer himself remains agnostic, the inherent undecidability of the argument seems to rule out the possibility of ever reaching a conclusive answer to the debate and thus, for all practical matters, holds that an objective description of reality is nowhere to be found. Chad Hansen, the most prominent advocate of this approach, explained this basic flaw in the way we use words by the recognition that all language is indexical: in philosophy and linguistics, indexicals are words that change their referents according to the context in which they are uttered by the speaker, such as “me,” “now,” or “here”; but in fact, “horse” and “cow” too have meanings only within the language scheme of each individual, still more so dichotomies such as “right” and “wrong” (Hansen 1992: 282–285).

It should be noted that defining this model as a critique of language is a complicated matter, since it can also mean that all language schemes are equally valid. Hansen brings this view to the extreme, claiming that the *Zhuangzi* overtly criticized Laozi and Mencius for their anti-language agendas (1992: 269–275); however, in the sense that all propositions – even those which do not explicitly belong to philosophical debates – commit to a certain worldview, this model can equally be interpreted as a complete distrust in words (Ivanhoe 1996: 199), or at least as a strong criticism of the way language is commonly used. Hansen himself implicitly acknowledged the problem, as he too interpreted the *Zhuangzian* ambiguity as a means of avoiding clear-cut statements (1992: 265–266). Wu Kuang-ming went one step further, claiming not only that the *Zhuangzian* style of writing was intended to enable each reader to extract her own interpretation of the text, but also that the very idea that the *Zhuangzi* was attempting to convey some hidden message was already a misunderstanding of the text; according to his reading, the authors did not try to establish any standpoint at all, but only to demonstrate – by moving from one

mistaken view to the next – that fixating on any particular view is inherently wrong (1982: 14–18).

### 3.4 *Language in the Qiwulun: Words as a Mechanism of Creation?*

Finally, a particularly revolutionary model of the linguistic mechanism can be found in the long “analytic” essay that constitutes the middle part of the *Qiwulun* 齊物論 (“Discourse on the Equality of Things” or “On Equalizing Things”<sup>22</sup>), the second chapter of the text and the most important source for studying the Zhuangzian attitude towards language. As Graham has convincingly shown, this essay seems to have been written in response to the philosophy of the Mingjia 名家 (“School of Names”), China’s earliest logicians, and particularly to the ideas of Huizi (Hui Shi 惠施) who is frequently mentioned in other parts of the text as Zhuangzi’s friend and philosophical rival (Graham 1969; on Huizi, see Raphals 1998; Fraser 2017). The many references to the Mingjia’s ideas and to their technical vocabulary, a fascinating issue in its own right, mark this essay as a sort of inter-philosophical discussion, which has presumably led the author to temporarily abandon the use of literary masks and turn to a more “academic” style of writing, compared to most parts of the text. At the same time, they can also explain the uniquely explicit discussion of language and its relation to the world that is found in the text, a topic that presumably stood at the heart of the logician’s interest. As I have suggested elsewhere (Porat 2015), it is possible that this essay, unlike most of the text, addresses the *cognitive* function of language rather than just its descriptive, communicative role, and that it consequently proposes a unique criticism of words that exceeds the mere question of correspondence: the problem, in that view, lies not in the inability of language to properly describe reality, but rather in its tendency to actively shape this reality it aims to describe.

See, for example, the following two passages – the first of which precedes the “words are not just wind” paragraph discussed earlier – which roughly mark the start and end points of the discussion, and can thus give a good clue as to its argument as a whole:<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, if *wu* 物 and *lun* 論 are grouped together, “Equalizing Discourses/Theories on Things”; for a detailed discussion of the possible translations of the title, see Huang 2005.

<sup>23</sup> The special importance of these two paragraphs in the overall context of the *Qiwulun* is that they contain the first and last explicit references in the text to the philosophy of Huizi, who, as Graham convincingly claimed, was most likely the main philosophical antagonist of the essay (and possibly its designated addressee). As mentioned in footnote 9, the “going to Yue today and arriving there yesterday” in the first of the two paragraphs, which out of context might seem like an arbitrary example of an absurd saying, is in fact Huizi’s seventh thesis as cited in the *Tianxia* chapter of the *Zhuangzi*; this implicit reference might have served as a hint as to the real target of criticism in this passage, implying that Huizi himself is the one who takes “what does not exist to exist.” The sec-

If we follow our prejudices and take them as our guide, who will not have such a guide? Why should only those who are intelligent make such mental choices for themselves? The foolish do the same thing. If one claims that right and wrong (是非) exist before they are established in the mind (心), that is like saying one sets out for Yue today but arrived there yesterday. *To do so is to regard nonbeing (無有) as being (有)*. (Mair 1994: 14, modified;<sup>24</sup> 4/2/21–22)

Since all things are one (一), how can there be anything to talk about (言)? But since I have already said that all things are one, how can there be nothing to talk about? One and speech makes two, two and one makes three. Continuing on in this fashion, even the cleverest mathematician couldn't keep up, how much less an ordinary person! Therefore, if in proceeding from nonbeing (無) to being (有) we arrive at three, how much farther we shall reach when proceeding from being to being. *Better not to proceed at all*.<sup>25</sup> (Mair 1994: 18–19, modified; 5/2/53–55)

The first paragraph attacks the unfounded belief, in the author's view, that the "right" and "wrong" (*shifei* 是非) – the basic markers of duality in the terminology

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ond paragraph does not contain a quotation of Huizi's saying, but rather seems to be a direct response to his views, as manifested in the passage to which it responds:

There is nothing in the world bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount Tai is little. No one has lived longer than a dead child, and Pengzu died young. Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten thousand things are one with me. (Watson 2013: 13; 5/2/51–52)

As Graham has convincingly shown, there are good reasons to believe that what seems again to be a set of paradoxical sentences (which was traditionally attributed to Zhuangzi himself) was in fact a direct reference to Huizi's claims, which seems to have been intended to discredit the idea of spatial and temporal divisions in order to introduce a metaphysical basis for the doctrine of universal love: if there is no distinction between you and me, I ought to love you as I love myself (Graham 1969: 138–141, 144–145; Hu 1922: 111–117). The last line in particular seems to parallel Huizi's tenth, conclusive thesis: "*Let love embrace the ten thousand things; Heaven and earth are a single body*" (297; 93/33/73–74). Following this analysis, the second paragraph presented here is in fact a Zhuangzian criticism of Huizi's notion of unity, particularly with regard to the impact of language which he presumably ignored ("Since all things are one, how can there be anything to talk about?").

<sup>24</sup> Hereafter, my modification will be presented in italics.

<sup>25</sup> The important point for the purpose of our matter is the explicit call not to proceed from nonbeing to being, "*never take this step*," in Graham's words (1969: 155), which in this context seems to mean avoiding the use of language, *yan* 言. However, this line is only the first part of an implication, the second of which – the expected outcomes of "not proceeding" – is the phrase *yin shi yi* 因是已, which can be translated in two very different manners:

1. *Going by the "this" (yinshi 因是) and nothing more (yi 已)* (see for example Watson's "*Better not to move but to let things be*" (2013: 13) or Ziporyn's "*Rather than moving from anywhere to anywhere, then, let us just go by the rightness of whatever is before us as the present 'this'*" (2009: 16)).
2. Following Graham's suggestion to read *yi* 已 as the full verb "to cease," *The "going by the 'this'" will come to an end* (1969: 144; 2003b: 15). While the meaning of this phrase is highly important for understanding the Qiwulunian notion of liberation, it does not have much impact on the current discussion.

of the text<sup>26</sup> – have any reality outside of the human mind, an idea he explicitly describes as referring to “nonbeing” (*wuyou* 無有) as “being” (*you* 有), to what does not exist as existing. At first glance, this critique might sound relativistic, as the author claims that not only the Confucians and Mohists, but in fact everyone, the intelligent and the fool alike, have their own way of dividing the world into “right” and “wrong” claims; however, the text does not merely point to the subjectivity of all conceptual divisions, but further addresses the process by which they are formed in the mind (*xin* 心). This is an important nuance, as it implicitly acknowledges the nonduality that precedes the formation of this dichotomy, and thus highlights a different sort of conceptual mistake: not only believing that certain worldviews reflect the true state of affairs and others do not (the assumption criticized by the relativist), but also ignoring the fact that none of these schemes were “real” in the first place, given that they are all simply constructions of our minds; presumably, this is the reason why the author refers to worldviews which are based on conceptual divisions not just as mistaken, but also as “seeing what does not exist as existing.” Similarly, the second paragraph explains how words (*yan* 言) turn unity into duality via a recursive process of multiplication, a process it again describes as the movement from “nonbeing” (*wu* 無) to “being” (*you* 有). Here, too, the explicit reference to the process by which duality is constructed is of crucial importance, as it breaks the apparent parallelism between these two states and grants them different epistemological statuses: while the dual “being” was formed in our minds (*xin* 心) by our linguistic habits (*yan* 言), the pre-divided “nonbeing” or “oneness” (*yi* 一) do not appear to be dependent on any mental act and thus, to use a somewhat anachronistic term, represents a more “objective” description of reality.

The identification of language as the mechanism by which nonbeing/nonduality is turned into being/duality grants it a crucially important role in this model, as it no longer defines language simply as the way by which the various divisions of the world are manifested, but also as one of their causes. See, for example, the following pivotal paragraph, taken from the middle part of the essay:

As for a thing, call it something (謂) and that is so (然) .... Therefore when *the act of deeming something as “this”* (*weishi* 為是) picks out a stalk from a pillar, a hag from beautiful Xishi, things however peculiar or incongruous, Dao interchanges them and deems them one. Their dividing is their formation, their formation is their dissolution. All things whether

<sup>26</sup> The duo *shi* 是 and *fei* 非, normally translated as “right” and “wrong,” are two of the most important technical terms in the *Qiwulun*, and, correspondingly, two of the more challenging to translate. The terms indicate both the distinction between “right” and “wrong” in the moral sense, as in the “right/wrong deed,” and the correctness or incorrectness of an assertion, as in the claim “this X is/ is not an ox.” An alternative translation of *shi* 是, therefore, is “this,” which I preferred in translating the technical duo *yinshi* 因是 (“going by a certain ‘this’”, see footnote. 25) and *weishi* 為是 (“deeming something as ‘this’”); to complicate things even further, *shi* 是 can also be contrasted with *bi* 彼, indicating the distinction between “this” and “that”. Graham himself translated *shi* 是 and *fei* 非 as “that’s it” and “that’s not,” *shi* 是 and *bi* 彼 as “it” and “other” (1969: 142–143), and *yinshi* 因是/ *weishi* 為是 as “adaptive/contrived ‘that’s it’” (1969: 153) or as “that’s it which goes by circumstances/ which deemed” (1989a: 52–53). For an entire manuscript dedicated to the meaning of these two terms in the *Zhuangzi*, see Ma and Van Brakel 2019.



forming or dissolving in reverting interchange and are deemed to be one. (Graham 1989a: 53, modified; 4/2/33–36)

Like the two paragraphs above, this passage too not only draws a clear distinction between the pre-divided unity and the world of things, but also explains how the latter was formed by our conceptual and verbal actions. Things are not “so” (*ran* 然) due to some inherent qualities that they possess, but rather because we named them so (*wei* 謂); similarly, the stalk was not differentiated from the pillar and the ugly from the beautiful because of their inherent “stalkness” or “ugliness,” but simply because we deemed them to be a certain “this” (*weishi* 為是).<sup>27</sup> Later in the chapter, the text explicitly states that the “this” and “so” are not “this” and “so,” because if that was indeed the case, there would have been no place for an argument about their identities (7/2/90–91); such an anti-essentialist view rebuts not only the neo-Mohist search for the “right” speech (because there are no natural categories to which our linguistic labels can correspond), but also the romantic idealization of any “authentic” nature: we cannot “bypass” words and get to the pre-verbal “this” and “that,” simply because outside of these conceptual classifications language has imposed on the world, no “this” and “that” are to be found.

Everything is “that” in relation to other things and “this” in relation to itself. We may not be able to see things from the standpoint of “that,” but we can understand them from the standpoint of “this.” Therefore, it may be said that “that” derives from “this” and that “this” is dependent upon “that.” Such is the notion of the cogenesis of “this” and “that” .... But is there really a “this” and a “that”? Or is there really no “this” and no “that”? Where “this” and “that” cease to be opposites, there lies the pivot of the Way. (Mair 1994: 15; 4/2/27–31)

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<sup>27</sup>I follow A.C. Graham in interpreting *shi* 是 in this phrase as an independent concept (“right,” “this”), and consequently the entire phrase as referring to the condemned act of deeming something as “this” or “right” which fixates the individual on a certain perspective (as mentioned in the previous footnote, Graham himself translated the phrase as “that’s it which deemed” (1989a: 52–53) or “contrived ‘that’s it’” (1969: 153); see also Ziporyn 2009: 16, “establishing definitions of what is ‘this,’ what is ‘right,’” Coutinho 2004: 171, “artificial judgment,” Mair 1994: 19, “It’s all because of ‘this,’” Watson 2013: 13, “the recognition of a ‘this’”). While Graham’s reading was adopted in some way or another by many scholars in the last decades, most interpretations of the text follow the traditional reading of *weishi* 為是, which takes *shi* 是 as a simple anaphor (“this” as referring to the previous discussion) and consequently the entire phrase to mean “because of,” “therefore,” or “thus” (for discussion, see Ma and Van Brakel 2019: 97–99). A strong argument in favor of Graham’s reading is the fact that the phrase *weishi* 為是 is never once used as an anaphor in other parts of the *Zhuangzi*; in fact, except for its four occurrences within the *Qiwulun*, *weishi* 為是 appears only three more times in the entire text (in chapters 14, 23, and 27), all of which, similar to Graham’s suggestion, are in the sense of “taking/deeming something as ‘this/right.’” This rarity casts doubt on the anaphoric reading of the phrase, because even if only some of the Zhuangzian authors were to use *weishi* 為是 in the sense of “therefore,” we would expect to see this usage elsewhere in the text. On the other hand, the *Qiwulun* contains more than two dozen occurrences of *shi* 是 as the independent concept of “right/this” – usually as one part of duality, alongside *fei* 非 “wrong” or *bi* 彼 “that” – a fact that posits it as one of the most important and loaded terms within the chapter. Even if we do accept the grammatical plausibility of the anaphoric reading, therefore, it seems unlikely that the one essay within the text that places so much emphasis on *shi* 是 as a technical term would also be the only one to use the term as a part of this grammatically irregular form of “therefore.”



While not discussing language directly, this passage might give a clue as to how this conceptual–linguistic mechanism works, which goes back to the equation of “dividing” (*fen* 分) and “formation” (*cheng* 成) in the previous passage: much like the Saussurean theory of meaning formation, it seems that the Zhuangzian author too assumed that the meaning of a sign/concept is determined by its contrast with other linguistic signs, and not by any objective features of its referent (Berkson 1996: 104–106). The similar wording of the double question here brings to mind its possible parallelism with the question of meaning as presented in the “words are not just wind” paragraph:

to the extent that words really do say something, there really is a “this” and a “that,” albeit a subjective one; one may operate within these borders of duality, as long as one remembers that its foundational dichotomies are just the result of their conceptual separation from one another. But as the previous paragraph states, there is also another side to this equation, a vision of reality which is not dependent on these mental and linguistic framings: from the point of view of Dao, which presumably does not use “naming” or deem things as “this,” the “this” and the “that” are no longer separate from each other, and all things are perceived in their untouched form: as one.

## 4 Conclusion: The Problem of Language in the *Zhuangzi*

The classification suggested in Sects. 3.1–3.3 roughly corresponds to three of the main interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* and its goals, stressing the “mystical,” naturalistic, or analytic aspects of the text. Much like other issues dealt with in the *Zhuangzi*, this division does not entail, of course, that the different views of language are mutually exclusive, or that they were developed in isolation from one another; given the complicated interrelation between the different parts of the text, it is more reasonable to assume that the various authors/interpreters who emphasized these different views shared at least some vague notion about “the inadequacy of words,” but developed it to match their own philosophical vision. An important point, however, is that these views are theoretically independent, in the sense that each of them can be advocated regardless of the other two;<sup>29</sup> this fact alone stresses the necessity of

<sup>28</sup> Compare:

果有言邪?其未嘗有言邪?	果且有彼是乎哉?果且無彼是乎哉?
Is there really a saying?Or is there no saying?	Is there really a “this” and a “that”?Or is there really no “this” and no “that”?

<sup>29</sup> A simple argument for the independence of these views is their separate existence in other contexts. As stated above, the ineffability of the absolute is a very common principle among various

further examining the different attitudes towards language in the text, a richness that might easily go unnoticed when trying to extract one coherent “Zhuangzian” view.

A basic principle that does seem to stand in the background of all of these views is the instrumentalization of words, the idea that language is not a precise reflection of reality, but rather an element within it, a tool: as Confucius explains in the fourth chapter, words are like wind and waves that can be easily moved, but can also put their utterer at risk when handled carelessly (10/4/49–50). The model suggested in Sect. 3.4, however, takes this view one step further, as it places language next to thought not simply as an element within reality, but rather as one of the forces that shapes reality as it is commonly perceived. This analysis of the essay, if accepted, depicts a theory that places more emphasis on the linguistic mechanism than any of the previous views, and consequently introduces the harshest criticism of language so far: if words are simply an inadequate means of conveying reality, then one may still embrace other methods of understanding while leaving language more or less intact. If, however, language is one of the reasons why the world was divided in the first place – namely, an inherent part of the problem, at least from a nondual point of view – then the “solution” requires a reversion of our linguistic and conceptual habits, a task much harder to achieve: in a way, we need not stop talking, but rather stop “thinking” in words. The text itself does not specify such methods of conceptual undoing, although they might be implied in related works such as the *Neiye*’s (內業) suggestion to calm the mind through the “awareness that precedes words” (*yi yi xian yan* 意以先言) (Roth 1999: 72–73). Whether the Zhuangzian author was actually aiming at such a direct experience of pre-verbal cognition or whether he simply saw it as a thought experiment, one cannot deny the important role language played in his model, which brought to extremes the Zhuangzian tendency to not take things for granted: the idea that life is better than death, the common standards of beauty or morality, the benefit of having a philosophical argument and even the very existence of things – all these alleged truisms were put into question by the Zhuangzian authors, who as thinkers were characterized not necessarily by their final conclusions, but rather by their philosophical courage. The unbiased discussion of language, however, is noteworthy even in comparison to this gigantic enterprise of deconstruction, simply because language is the means by which philosophical deconstruction takes place. The Zhuangzian sage, therefore, does not take this step, but instead looks straight into the place where no right and wrong have ever existed, the place in which words have never said anything more than the chirping of birds.

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religious systems, such as the indescribability of God in certain trends of Judaism and Christianity (Jacobs 2015); needless to say, this view does not require naturalistic or relativistic presumptions. Similarly, the idea that language distances us from our true nature is equally represented by Western Romanticism (Scharfstein 1993: 109–118); here, too, no absolutist or relativist assumptions are required. Finally, as for the relativist view of language, one does not even have to look for exterior examples: as stated earlier, Hansen himself, its most prominent advocate, interprets the relativist view not only as being independent of absolutism or naturalism, but also as directly negating those views.

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# Chapter 12

## Zhuangzi's “Three Words”: Text and Authority



Daniel Fried

### 1 Introduction: Text and Provenance

At the beginning of the “Entrusted Words” (*Yuyan pian*, 寓言篇) chapter,<sup>1</sup> the *Zhuangzi* gives a description of three forms of speech, often identified in Chinese criticism as the *sanyan*: “entrusted words” (*yuyan* 寓言), “respected words” (*zhongyan* 重言), and “goblet words” (*zhiyan* 卮言). Because the passage has traditionally been interpreted as ZHUANG Zhou’s 莊周 personal description of his own method in writing the *Zhuangzi*, it carried an exceptionally heavy weight in traditional exegeses of the text as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The first such exegesis is incorporated into the final, *Tianxia* 天下 chapter of the extant *Zhuangzi*, which lists the *sanyan* 三言 as one of the most important features of Zhuang Zhou’s writing, despite its having been mentioned only in the “Entrusted Words” chapter. Later, Su Shi 蘇軾 would codify this reading, noting officially that “This is *Zhuangzi*’s own description of his principles of composition” 此莊子自敘其作書之旨, despite also finding Yang Zhu’s influence in the chapter; and WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 later called it a “postfaced exemplar for the entire book” 全書之序例. (Wang S. 1988: 1089)

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<sup>1</sup>The Chinese title of this section, *Yuyan* 寓言, has been given many translations, befitting the complex history of interpretation. For example, Watson translated it as “Imputed Words” (Watson 1968: 303), Graham as “Saying from a lodging place” (Graham 1981: 25), and Ziporyn as “Words Lodged Elsewhere” (Ziporyn 2009: 114). Translations of the main texts discussed here are my own, adapted from Fried 2007.

<sup>2</sup>It has occasionally even been suggested that this first section of the “Entrusted Words” chapter was a deliberately composed postscript of Zhuang Zhou (Yang 1986: 36).

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For the most part, modern exegetes have differed greatly in their approaches to the passage. Several scholars, especially in comparative philosophy, have taken great interest in “goblet words”; these works will be discussed below. However, Chinese critics approaching the text of the *Zhuangzi* as a whole have tended to agree with traditional exegetes that the passage is a key statement of principle, but there are greatly varying degrees of detail in which critics are willing to engage while trying to resolve the hermeneutical knots of the passage. For example, CHEN Guying 陳鼓應 treats it as a simple summary of the marvelously odd narrative style of the book in general (Chen 2014b: 361); although elaborating more about the semiotic and rhetorical implications of the passage, WANG Bo 王博 ends in the same place, holding the passage as a marker of *Zhuangzi*’s “attitude of establishing words, while also yet smashing words.” 一邊立言,另一邊卻又破言的態度 (Wang 2013: 28) On the other hand, we have sometimes fairly complex theories, such as LIU Gusheng’s 劉固盛 proposition that the *zhiyan* is a mode of reconciling differences between the *yuyan* and *chongyan* (Liu 2009: 64), or a series of different theories from ZHANG Hongxing 張洪興 on the tropes’ relation to pre-Qin metaphor, and their implications for philosophical and rhetorical method.

For good reasons that will be explored below, textual criticism has treated the passage relatively conservatively. LIU Xiaogan 劉笑敢 considers the whole chapter as belonging to what he calls the “Transmitters” (*shu Zhuang pai* 述莊派), largely on account of the resonances this section has with the “Discourse on Making Things Equal”. (Liu 1994) Moreover, A.C. Graham assimilates the material to a linguistic theory of the “unanalyzable knack” familiar from the Wheelwright Pian allegory. (Graham 1989: 201) However, so far, those who have made the most out of the passage have also usually shied away from considering its textual evolution—no doubt because opening this question threatens the putative centrality of the passage.

Because there are many knotty issues of interpretation of individual characters in this passage, the exegetical history shows many points of dissension, and it is impossible to offer a complete review of these here.<sup>3</sup> Instead, for a reference work such as this volume, it is important to reconsider the text and try to reconstruct in what ways the passage may be a guide to the rest of the *Zhuangzi*. As will be demonstrated below, the text should certainly not be considered a simple set of hermeneutical instructions left to the reader, but it may nonetheless have some value in understanding the final composition of the text.

For ease in the following exegesis, it is best to start with a translation of the complete passage, broken into sections that are numbered for ease of reference:

- 1 *The entrusted-words are nine-tenths,*  
*The respected-words are seven-tenths,*
- 2 *The goblet-words come out daily,*  
*And match the heavenly distinction.*

<sup>3</sup>For interested readers, a good introduction to the various points of contention is in Cui 2012: 734–8.



- 3 "The entrusted-words are nine-tenths,"—[this means] borrowing something external to speak of things.
- 4 A father is not the matchmaker for his own son, because a father praising him is not as good as someone other than the father.
- 5 That is not my fault, it is other people's fault.
- 6 Someone who is the same as oneself will respond [to this praise]; someone not the same as oneself will oppose [it]. Those who are the same as oneself will affirm [it], those different from oneself will deny [it].
- 7 "The respected-words are seven-tenths"—this is that which puts an end to debate.
- 8 These are of venerable men, from prior years; but those<sup>4</sup> elders who have no warp nor woof, no root nor tip—these are not "prior".
- 9 If a person has nothing that makes him prior to others, he lacks the Way of being a person. If a person lacks the Way of being a person, then that is an "old person".
- 10 *The goblet-words come out daily,  
And harmonize with the heavenly divisions.*
- 11 *Through this they spread out,  
And thereby bring years to a close.*
- 12 If one does not speak, then there is evenness; but evenness [joined with] speech is uneven, and speech [joined with] evenness is uneven.
- 13 Therefore it is said: don't speak.
- 14 To speak without speaking, this is to speak one's whole life, to never cease speaking. If one never speaks, one has never not spoken.
- 15 There is a source for the admissible, and there is a source for the inadmissible; there is a source for [being]-so, and there is a source for [being]-not-so. How is it so? It is so because it is so. How is it not so? It is not so because it is not so. How is it admissible? It is admissible because it is admissible. How is it inadmissible? It is inadmissible because it is inadmissible. Things certainly have that which makes them so, things certainly have that which makes them admissible. Nothing is not so, nothing is not admissible.
- 16 If there were not goblet words to come forth daily, harmonized with the heavenly divisions, how could one last long?
- 17 All things are seeds, and yield to each other through differing forms. Beginning and ending are as a loop, with no one knowing its order or sequence: this is called the heavenly equality. The heavenly equality is the heavenly division.

There are several important reasons why this passage has seemed so authoritative to most readers of the *Zhuangzi*, from early commentaries through the present: (A) Section (5) uses the pronoun "my" (*wu* 吾), possibly implying the putative author's personal defense of the text.<sup>5</sup> (B) Certain sections of the "goblet words" verses and exegesis are closely related to passages in the "Discussion on Making Things Equal" (*Qi Wu Lun* 齊物論) chapter, often considered as among the most central and canonical of all the various materials collected in the *Zhuangzi*. (C) The last chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, "All Under Heaven" (*Tianxia* 天下), explicitly describes these three forms of speech as integral to Zhuang Zhou's own method of writing:

Zhuang Zhou heard news [of the Way] and was delighted at it. He used absurd speeches, fantastic language, and disorganized words; sometimes he goes on without order, but did manifest any bias. He held the world as something turbid, and as something with which he

<sup>4</sup>Taking 期 as 斯, as per Gao Heng (Cui 2012: 737).

<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that this was never a major reading advanced by classical exegetes; Cheng Xuanying, for example, held that the *wu* should be read in the voice of the fictional father being invoked in the metaphor of the matchmaker (Wang S. 1988: 1091).

could not hold a serious conversation; [so] he used goblet words to overflow, used repeated words as something true, and used entrusted words to broaden [his acceptability].

Finally, (D) The *Zhuangzi* is often thought of as the canonical first source for “allegories” in the Chinese tradition, and this particular passage really is the first extant use of the term, *yuyan*, which is now the standard term for “allegory” in modern Chinese. The text of the *Zhuangzi* is now so famous for its wildly imaginative and beautifully rendered philosophical anecdotes, and these are (reasonably) categorized as “allegories” in modern criticism. As a result, this passage has taken on enormous authority, as it seems to offer *Zhuangzi*’s own personal explanation for his compositional method: everyone “knows” that Zhuang Zhou was an allegorist, and here he seems to be explaining exactly what allegory is.

However, it is reasonably easy to discount (D) as a simple reason to ascribe a high degree of authority to this passage: the simple conflation of *yuyan* with “allegory”, and the retrospective categorization of Zhuang Zhou as an allegorist, are both relatively late developments in the exegetical history of the text. The first unequivocal gloss of *yuyan* along the lines that had been developed by European Romantic theories of allegory, as a semiotic mode (rather than a literary trope) lodging a meaning in external signs, seems to be that of Wang Xianqian (王先謙, 1842–1917); this gloss was then amplified by Hu Yuanjun (胡遠濬, 1866–1931).<sup>6</sup> Among contemporary scholarship that also reads the passage in this semiotic fashion, such comments are usually buttressed with arguments from the allegorical content of the *Zhuangzi* (e.g. Zhang 2007: 277; Zhang C. 2011: 184–5);<sup>7</sup> but it should be clear that such a line of argument assumes both that this passage derives from Zhuang Zhou personally, and also that Zhuang Zhou intended to compose “allegories” as that word is now defined. As will be shown below, neither assumption is warranted; hence, the vague airs of exegetical importance that seem to circulate about the term, *yuyan*, should not in themselves be considered evidence that this passage can be used as a key for interpretation of the earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi*.

Points (A) through (C) in favor of the authority of this passage are less immediately striking, but potentially more important. In particular, (C) offers a direct claim that the passage should be considered central, and that statement is clear enough that we should not dismiss it out of hand. At the least, it is sufficient evidence that the authority of Zhuang Zhou was ascribed to the “Entrusted Words” passage no later than Guo Xiang’s 郭象 Jin-era recension—and probably by the Western Han, which for most scholars has been the *terminus ante quem* of the *Tianxia* intellectual history. However, despite a possibly early date, there are also reasons not to lend credence to the *Tianxia* chapter. Most obviously, we have no particular reason to think that that chapter became associated with the *Zhuangzi* corpus at the same time

<sup>6</sup>“案意在此。而言寄於彼。” (Wang X. 1988: 66); “寓言者。意在此。而言乃寄之於彼。” (Hu 1988: 237).

<sup>7</sup>Zhang Caimin’s argument on this point is admittedly clever and novel, arguing that a Zhuangzian semiotics sees fit to use any image as a vehicle for meaning, because all objects are carriers of the Way.

as the "Entrusted Words" passage; therefore, it is entirely possible that it represents a later interpretive accretion that understood the passage in question as Zhuang Zhou's own personally-provided key to his thought. Moreover, the *Tianxia* chapter is explicitly presented from that viewpoint of a later interpreter. It is not even a text focused exclusively on Zhuang Zhou, but is a more general survey of one strand of debate within pre-Qin philosophy, including Zhuangzi and Laozi, but also Mozi, HUI Shi 惠施, and GONGSUN Long 公孫龍, without devoting any more time or attention to Zhuang Zhou than to the others. Although this chapter is impressive and valuable, and good evidence that the "Entrusted Words" was held as authoritative at some point before Guo Xiang, we cannot take it as good evidence that we should continue to hold the passage as authoritative.

Careful examination of evidence for the first two points, (A) and (B), yields similar reasons for skepticism. The use of the first-person pronoun, as per (A), does seem to make the case for Zhuang Zhou's original authorship more persuasive at an intuitive level. However, we do not know who wrote the pronoun in question; and in any case, it seems not to have any reliable implication beyond the immediate context of the matchmaker metaphor. Perhaps it is a fictional projection of a Zhuang Zhou voice, referring to "my" ideas as set forth in the earlier chapters, and perhaps not. Therefore, the only strong evidence for a central role for this section, as in (B), is the real similarity of this passage to sections of the "Discourse on Making Things Equal", and that does seem to tie this passage directly to the historical Zhuang Zhou. This intertextual linkage will be discussed at length below in the section on "goblet words"; for now, it is sufficient to state that the relationship is strong, but not strong enough to conclusively prove an exact origin in Zhuang Zhou or traditions close in time to his person. Moreover, we have other evidence pointing away from Zhuang Zhou's authorship. Section (6) is clearly related to a similar passage in "Being and Pardoning" (*Zai You* 在宥).<sup>8</sup> There is disagreement as to the provenance of this section of the "Being and Pardoning" chapter: for example, it is classified as Syncretist by Graham, but as belonging to the "Transmitters" by Liu Xiaogan. However, no scholar I have seen accords it the same weight as the "Discourse on Making Things Equal".

Because of the unreliability of the assumptions behind points (A) and (B), as discussed above, it therefore seems a good idea to be skeptical of the traditional notion that this passage was an exegetical instruction manual. We do not have hard evidence that this was section really was left behind personally by Zhuang Zhou in order to facilitate the reading of all the allegories that come in the earlier chapters of the book. Instead, we can get a better idea of the purposes and sources for this text by examining the different registers of language that appear in it. As emphasized by italics in the above translation, the received text alternates between rhymed tetrasyllabic couplets and normal prose which repeats some of those tetrasyllabic sections

<sup>8</sup> "Common people of the age all like people similar to themselves, and hate those different from themselves. This desiring of the same as themselves, and not desiring those different from themselves they do not desire, comes from a mind to be different from the many." 世俗之人,皆喜人之同乎己,而惡人之異於己也。同於己而欲之、異於己而不欲者,以出乎眾為心也。

in the process of giving explanations. One cannot prove that these are not from the same hand; and, if one does accept the early provenance of the Inner Chapters, one can still find alternations of gnomic verse and prose there. However, whatever the origin of this passage, the clear function of the alternative sections is as a presentation of verse and commentary. Even if this is not enough to prove that the prose glosses came from a separate and later editorial hand, one would not be surprised if this could be demonstrated from external evidence.

Therefore, it will be assumed that the author of the “Entrusted Words” chapter is trying to explicate received gnomic verse which has some filiative relationship with the “Discourse on Making Things Equal,” and possibly with the gnomic verses in *Laozi* texts. It is probably impossible to determine at what stage in any transition from oral to script transmission the commentator was working, and it is definitely impossible to determine any “original” meaning of these verses prior to commentary. However, it should be noted that the commentaries on these verses do seem to be discussing topics thematically related to various forms of oral communication, not written work. The latter cannot be ruled out (these are all metaphorical discussions of rhetorical modes, after all) but the issue of transmission, whether oral or written, will be highlighted in the detailed examination of each mode, below. And this is natural, because of course the metaphors chosen to name these modes are themselves all about transmission—the first two clearly foreground the issue of whose words are being handed down, and why; while the third, despite its cryptic language, is still also clearly talking about time and succession.

## 2 Entrusted Words

The contemporary Mandarin use of *yuyan* to mean “allegory” requires us to consider whether in fact there is something “allegorical” about the specific trope being described in this passage. What “allegory” is to begin with, is a question with a particularly complex discursive history in recent literary theory, and the term has been used as a kind of master-cipher to lend a postmodern character to all literary language. (de Man 1978) However, we may sidestep such questions and simply offer a provisional definition of allegory as a trope in which an image is strongly associated with a philosophical meaning perceivable as external to the literal text. By this definition, the explanation of *yuyan* in section (3) as “relying on something external to speak of things” (藉外論之) might seem to describe something truly allegorical. From this phrase alone, one could propose the Zhuangzian *yuyan* as an othering semiotic mode: that which is external is the literary image, and this image is made to refer to a philosophical truth in ways that foreground the gap between sign and referent. Alternatively, without resorting to semiotic explanations, we could simply put things in the very reasonable terms of traditional scholarship, and ask, along with Zhang Hongxing, “What is Zhuangzi ‘entrusting’ to ‘words’?” (Zhang H. 2011: 62) The natural answer for Zhang is that it is the Dao which is so entrusted; and if this is the correct interpretation, then we could safely categorize the

most famous stories of the *Zhuangzi*, such as the *peng* bird and *kun* fish, or the butterfly dream, as examples of *yuyan*, whether or not we want to think of those as "allegories".

Although the first words used in the exegesis do suggest this as a possible understanding, and it should not be ruled out, the term itself, as well as the broader context of its deployment here, suggest that *yuyan* should not be understood as borrowing external signs. In fact, closer reading of the passage in question suggests that what is borrowed is external personal authority. Etymologically, the character *yu* originally means to find external lodging, in the house of another. In addition, the implication of a rhetorical mode not associated with abstract linguistic signs so much as externalized relationships is strongly buttressed by the metaphor of the father who will not act as a matchmaker for his own son. Taken in the context of a traditional understanding of this chapter as providing Zhuang Zhou's own personal explication of his method, the meaning is clear enough. Zhuang Zhou used fictional anecdotes, ascribing his own philosophical views to various named characters (historical or mythological) in order to increase their authority and secure a hearing for his ideas. Note that the key phrase of this section, "relying on something external to speak of things" could just as easily be read as, "relying on someone external to speak of things": it is not necessarily about the "allegorical" use of an external image to illustrate a doctrine, but the fictional attribution of a concept to a well-known speaker. This would comport easily with the metaphor of the matchmaker introduced here, as it would also with the name of the trope, *yuyan*, which implies one person lodged at the home of another.

Moreover, many premodern exegetes share this understanding of the passage as describing a form of fictional attribution to external characters. Most of the extant corpus of the *Zhuangzi* as a whole seems to consist of such falsely attributed speeches, so it has been common in traditional criticism to assert that "nine-tenths" refers to the proportion of "entrusted words" in the work as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Among modern readers, one of the most interesting voicings of this position is that of Shuen-fu Lin, who fruitfully compared the *yuyan* to R.P. Blackmur's concept of the "mask": in Lin's reading, Confucius became a *yuyan*/mask behind which *Zhuangzi* spoke his own philosophical concepts. (Lin 1988)

If this is the correct understanding of *yuyan*, then it must be stressed how different the concept is from modern understandings of that term as a semiotic "allegory". By this more personal standard, the discussions attributed to Confucius are *yuyan*, but Zhuang Zhou's own discourse on swords with King Wen of Zhao is not; the story of Wheelwright Pian is a *yuyan*, but the butterfly-dream is not.<sup>10</sup> *Yuyan* is not

<sup>9</sup>This understanding of the passage may actually date to Sima Qian; without any reference to percentages, he wrote that *Zhuangzi* "wrote over 100,000 words, the majority of which were 'entrusted words'" (其著書十餘萬言,大抵率寓言也) (Wang S. 1988: 1090). However, it is not universal: from at least Cheng Xuanying's Tang edition, an alternate reading has suggested that the numbers here meant "nine-tenths" are believed by readers (Cui 2012: 735).

<sup>10</sup>Unless, of course, these are written by Zhuang Zhou's disciples or later writers and attributed to him! However, naïve contemporary understandings of "allegory" as "story with a philosophical

a trope determined by narrative or rhetorical style, but external attribution to anyone other than the author. This is a vision of the trope that might be deeply disappointing to readers of the *Zhuangzi* who are fans of his odd stories, thought of as allegorical, and who might hope to gain insight into their conception. However, what is actually listed as the justification for *yuyan* holds another kind of interest.

In this very brief passage, we are given a social explanation for the rhetorical use of claims to authority. One does not necessarily listen to or trust a philosopher who is speaking in his own voice, especially if the philosopher is perceived by his readership as being somehow “not the same as oneself” (*yi yu ji* 異於己). Instead, calling in an external authority as a kind of witness works to exploit readers’ prejudices and gain a hearing for one’s philosophy. One can only speculate as to the grounds on which assumed perceptions of similarity and difference are being defined: anti-Confucian arguments that “cite” Confucius may indicate a desire to overcome intellectual factionalism. In any case, we can provisionally conclude at least one thing about the readership expected by the text—namely, it seems to have been expected that the fictional attributions would have been taken seriously. Otherwise, the logic of attribution to authority outlined in this passage would not have any persuasive power. This is highly counter-intuitive for experienced readers, who might find it difficult to believe that attributions of Zhuangzian Daoism to Confucius (much less to the Yellow Emperor, in the Huang-Lao materials scattered through later strata) could be taken at face value. However, in an archaic society where textual circulation was much more highly circumscribed by region and class, we should be open to the possibility of naïve readerships large enough to make fictional attributions a reasonable rhetorical strategy.

### 3 Respected Words

Lacking the generic reputation of *yuyan*, and the cryptic difficulties of *zhiyan*, the second term in this series, *zhongyan*, or “respected words” has always received the least interest and attention from exegetes. Perhaps most typical in this regard is Hongxing Zhang, whose monograph on the *sanyan* contains only a three-page section on the *zhongyan*. (Zhang H. 2011) Nonetheless, there are a few hermeneutical difficulties here worth review; if nothing else, a solid understanding of *zhongyan* would help to add additional contextualization for the other two terms in the series.

The primary debate over this second term has been how to read it: is it indeed *zhongyan*, or should it perhaps instead be read as *chongyan*, “repeated words”? However, the exact interpretive choice here does not have large practical consequences. If we should read it as *zhongyan*, this strongly implies a sense of *Zhuangzi* relying upon the words of former sages to express his own positions (e.g. Chen

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message” do not arise from textual critics. This is the point: *yuyan* is about attribution and authority, not the rhetorical form of a literary trope.

2014a: 728); this is virtually indistinguishable from a reading of *chong*. In fact, the lines that follow makes quite clear that both weight/respect (*zhong*) and repetition (*chong*) are implied: *zhongyan* refers to weighty, authoritative quotations from venerable ancient sources. In this regard, it is a very similar mode to *yuyan*; and in fact, most traditional exegetes seem to read the two first modes as close variations of each other.<sup>11</sup> The most likely way to harmonize these seems to be to read *zhongyan* as a subset of *yuyan*. *Yuyan* would include any discourse attributed to a speaker other than Zhuang Zhou, while *zhongyan* would be the subset of such discourses that are specifically attributed to ancient sages. This reading would also provide one way of making sense of the offered numbers as fractions: nine-tenths of the work is *yuyan*, while the somewhat more restrictive category, *zhongyan*, can be applied to seven-tenths. Whether or not those fractions would actually hold up to a statistical survey of the received text is irrelevant, because there is no way of knowing which fixed text (if any) the author of these gnomic verses may have been using, nor (if different) that used by the nameless exegete of this passage.

What is clear from the exegesis is that the notion of "priority" is being redefined in Dao-centric terms. Historical anteriority is not sufficient for a given speaker's words to be listed in the category of *zhongyan*. Instead, only those who behaved in sagely fashion are being singled out for reference as properly ancient and worthy of sagely respect.

## 4 Goblet Words

The third element in this tripartite division of *Zhuangzi's* tropes, *zhiyan* or "goblet words" is by far the most cryptic. Unlike the descriptors "entrusted" or "repeated", "goblet" is without any natural surface meaning when used to describe words. Moreover, the four lines of gnomic couplets allowed to it in (10)–(11) are not much more helpful, nor is the exegesis of these lines in (12)–(17): the reader is confronted with a series of obscure imagery, jumbled borrowings from other texts in the *Zhuangzi* corpus, and seemingly specialized vocabulary terms for which no definition is offered. If this is indeed an intact, coherent passage (rather than a pastiche of multiple sources), it is certainly one of the most difficult sections of the *Zhuangzi*.

As a result, it is not particularly surprising that classical exegetes appear baffled by the passage. Guo Xiang first annotated the *zhi* as an object which "tipped when full, and righted when empty" (滿則傾, 空則仰) and hence represented a highly changeable form of language which followed along the objects to which it referred. Contemporaneously with Guo, however, SIMA Biao (司馬彪, ?–306) read the "goblet" *zhi* as a character substitution for "stalk" (支), and understood the passage as saying that *Zhuangzi's* language was "fragmented" (*zhili* 支離). (Cui 2012: 735–6)

<sup>11</sup> Several commentators, ancient and modern, have suggested or implied this position. Perhaps the most succinct and clear in this regard is Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (Wang S. 1988: 1090).



For the most part, later exegetes tended to offer unconvincing glosses that more or less followed either Guo's or Sima's reading.

Modern commentary has generally tried to reason out the meaning of the "goblet words" in the context of the passage itself, or else in the context of other relevant philosophical issues. Kuang-Ming Wu, for example, approaching the issue from the context of philosophies of language, identified the trope as a philosophical concept challenging the state of the reading subject (Wu 1988), and in fact treated this destabilizing, intersubjective property of the "goblet words" as a methodological foundation for reading the text (Wu 1982: 31–9). In a work in Wu's honor, Kirill Ole Thompson identifies goblet words as words that "interact with, shake up, and shatter, the interlocutor's (the reader's) unconscious expectations (Thompson 2008: 68); similarly, Chen Guying has called the trope a form of "centerless language," apparently alluding to the classical conceptions of a *zhi* as something which pours out its contents (Chen 2014b: 362). Kim-Chong Chong has discussed "goblet words" in the context of *Zhuangzi's* theory and practice of metaphor more generally. (Chong 2006) In addition, most recently, Wai Wai Chiu has discussed the term as a general category under which to consider various different forms of deliberately ambiguous language deployed in the text. (Chiu 2015) These and other contemporary approaches largely give up on the classical attempt to define the *zhi*, but they are all more or less correct in their conclusions. The explanation of "goblet words" is directly tied to the language in the "Discourse on Making Things Equal" which is directed against the Logicians and Later Mohists, and their insistence in different ways on clear distinction and technical definition; and this continues to shine through the text, even when readers' primary concern is with philosophical import for the contemporary world.

Because of my own cantankerous disposition, I tried a different approach in a 2007 article, attempting to solve the older problem of defining the *zhi* raised by classical commentators. (Fried 2007) That piece took the "goblet words" in light of archaeological discoveries that illuminate the meaning of Guo Xiang's gloss of *zhi* as a kind of vessel that tips. Drawing on rarely-referenced but clear intertexts from the *Hanfeizi* and *Xunzi* (among other sources), and archaeological work on the Yangshao culture, that article argues that the *zhi* is a term which originally meant not goblets, but self-righting pots used in fields as irrigation tools, and offers an interpretation of *zhiyan* starting from that context.

An assumption of that article is that the gnomic verses (2), (10)–(11), and their exegesis offered in (12)–(17), are coherent, united, and closely linked to the historical Zhuang Zhou. One must grant that this passage is obscure, and seems to be putting together sentences that have no natural connection to each other—a good sign in many cases of textual corruption or of chaotic editing processes. However, in this case, the same chaotic combination of rhymes and explanations that seem not to hold together is to be found in very similar form within the "Discourse on Making Things Even":

*Harmonize it with the heavenly divisions.  
Through this they spread out,  
In addition, thereby bring years to a close.*

What does "harmonize it with the heavenly divisions" mean? He said, "Make true that which is not true, make so that which is not so. If the true is indeed true, then there is no need to argue the difference of the true from the not-true; if that which is so is indeed so, then there is no need to argue the difference of the so from the not-so."

和之以天倪，因之以曼衍，所以窮年也。謂和之以天倪？曰：是不是，然不然。是若果是也，則是之異乎不是也亦無辯；然若果然也，則然之異乎不然也亦無辯。

In this passage, there is an almost exact repetition of the gnomic verses—but without the key phrase, "goblet words". Nonetheless, the phrase "spreads out" (*manyān* 曼衍) is repeatedly linked to the *zhi* vessel in many other early texts, so that even if the goblet is not directly referenced in the "Discourse on Making Things Even", it is implied by the contextual rhetoric. The exegesis offered in that earlier chapter is also not the same as one sees in the "Entrusted Words" chapter, but it is clearly of a piece with the kind of language games around categories of affirmation and denial that are prominent in the "Discourse". Moreover, some of the phrases in the exegesis in the "Entrusted Words" chapter are taken more or less directly from other sections of the "Discourse".<sup>12</sup>

However, while one can acknowledge the strong intertextual links between the two passages in the different chapters, it is an open question how one should understand those linkages. It is perfectly plausible to argue that the close similarity in the two passages means that this section from the "Entrusted Words" chapter was either composed by Zhuang Zhou or an immediate disciple of his, thereby lending authority not just to the idea of "goblet words" but to "entrusted words" and "repeated words" as well. This would be a chain-link model of textual authority, in which the "goblet words" passage links both the "Discourse on Making Things Equal" and the rest of the "Entrusted Words" opening. This model would potentially even justify the judgment of the "All Under Heaven" chapter, which names the entrusted words, repeated words, and goblet words as central to Zhuang Zhou's personal expressive method.

On the other hand, it is also perfectly plausible to view the clear linkage of the "goblet words" passage to the "Discourse on Making Things Equal" as evidence of a later, deliberate interpolation. If a relatively late (say, Han-dynasty) reader possessed the Inner Chapters (if those were in fact from an early stratum of the text), and wanted to append his own judgment as to their method (either in his own voice, or presenting this as if coming from Zhuang Zhou), there would have been nothing preventing him from simply copying portions of the "Discourse" and including them in that explanation. And there are plenty of reasons to suspect such an act of later copying here: the *sanyan* clearly belong together structurally as a listing of tropes, but not one of them, not even the phrase "goblet words", is given in the "Discourse". Furthermore, while that earlier passage was certainly all about the difficulties of language, it was not treating language topologically, as the *sanyan* passage does. In addition, while the "All Under Heaven" chapter presents the triple-trope

<sup>12</sup>For example, the phrase, "惡乎然?然於然。惡乎不然?不然於不然...物固有所然,物固有所可,無物不然,無物不可。" is taken essentially verbatim from the "pointing and horses" critique of the *Gongsun Longzi* that appears in the "Discourse on Making Things Equal".

as one of the most important aspects of Zhuang Zhou's method, none of the three is mentioned at all before the "Entrusted Words" chapter—suggesting that both of those late chapters may have been incorporated into the main text at a late date, perhaps by the same hand.

What one cannot reasonably conclude is that the intertextual passages of the "goblet words" definition and the "Discourse on Making Things Equal" are the result of accidental textual corruption. The *sanyan* passage forms too coherent a whole rhetorical structure to be the result of a simple scribal error, as does the care with which passages from the "Discourse" were transferred to the new, topological context. The only thing that can be concluded with certainty is that, whether or not the *sanyan* concept was "original" to Zhuang Zhou or those close to him, by the time that the current text of the *Zhuangzi* was finalized, someone understood the "goblet words" as being an authoritative way of understanding Zhuang Zhou's use of language, and that this understanding was presented as a coherent part of a *sanyan* topology to readers by the end of the Han.

How should one understand the "goblet words" trope in the context of the passage as a whole? Because of the notorious difficulty of the passage, an exhaustive exegesis is probably impossible. However, it is possible at least to highlight an important theme that might be overlooked if one is not focusing on the programmatic presentation of the *sanyan* topology. Both the "entrusted words" and "repeated words" tropes are given exegeses that focus on the issue of authority. Despite the passage being most famous as the source of the modern word for "allegory", the point of those first two tropes is neither semiotic nor rhetorical in any common sense of those terms. It is instead focused on a certain intertwining of language with social licensing: the appeal to any "external" speaker via fictional attribution in the case of *yuyan*, and the specific appeal to the authority of ancient sages in the case of *zhongyan*. The *zhiyan*, clearly different in character from the first two, seems not to be about making any similar claims of attribution to authoritative speakers. Nonetheless, it does offer a somewhat different highlighting of the problems of authorizing language, and suggests that the greatest problems of understanding language are problems of authorization. Consider again sections (12)–(15):

- 12 If one does not speak, then there is evenness; but evenness [joined with] speech is uneven, and speech [joined with] evenness is uneven.
- 13 Therefore it is said: don't speak.
- 14 To speak without speaking, this is to speak one's whole life, to never cease speaking. If one never speaks, one has never not spoken.
- 15 There is a source for the admissible, and there is a source for the inadmissible; there is a source for [being]-so, and there is a source for [being]-not-so. How is it so? It is so because it is so. How is it not so? It is not so because it is not so. How is it admissible? It is admissible because it is admissible. How is it inadmissible? It is inadmissible because it is inadmissible. Things certainly have that which makes them so; things certainly have that which makes them possible. Nothing is not so, nothing is not possible.

The basic problem of language as suggested by (12) is one of superfluity: in a silent world, there would be no problem of proof, or justification of belief. It is only when one speaks that one has to try to justify the existence of statements about the world,

and that the possibility of language as a kind of superfluity arises. Once we have this problem of matching the world to statements about it has arisen, we then have the problem of justification. If one wishes to avoid this problem, as in (13)–(14), the only perfect solution is to remain silent. Nevertheless, if one must plunge ahead, (15) makes clear that one has to authorize that language.

That section is itself perhaps the most authoritative (in textual-critical terms) of the whole chapter, because it is so closely linked to passages of the "Discourse on Making Things Equal", which are themselves usually accorded a very central position in *Zhuangzi* exegesis. However, its own internal conception of the source of that authority is more mysterious than intertextuality. We are told that admissibility and thus-ness comes from somewhere ("有自也而可", "有自也而然"),<sup>13</sup> but not what that source is. Instead, the text seems to retreat into the language games typical of the "Discourse" which were stimulated by Zhuang Zhou's engagement with the Logicians and Later Mohists, for example: "How is it admissible? It is admissible because it is admissible." ("恶乎可可于可") Such maddening passages are perhaps intended to madden, but it is often an under-appreciated fact that 可, here translated as "admissible" seems to have a technical use. As Steve Coutinho has written about Later Mohist use of the term, "Mohist logic takes acceptability *ke* 可 and unacceptability *buke* 不可 as basic, where we talk of 'truth' and 'falsehood'. These evaluative terms are quite explicitly normative: one's claims are judged according to their acceptability." (Coutinho 2004: 107) Coutinho's argument that the "Discourse on Making Things Equal" refers explicitly to Mohist logic in passages such as this can be extended to its later appearance here, and tells us something about the comparative importance of authority to such discussions. Pure judgments of truth and falsehood (是非) are possible in this rhetoric, but they are just as often phrased in terms of the admissible, i.e. subjective assent. The effect of the *Zhuangzi*'s language games here is to put into question exactly what the source of assent is.

When in the following sentences the text goes on to say that objects have that which makes them thus, or which makes them admissible ("物固有所然物固有所可"), it seems to be shifting the proper focus of logical judgments from the judging mind to the world itself. That which makes an object so, or "admissible" is contained in the object itself. However, if the authority for the logical assessment is in the object itself, rather than in the assessor, the assessment is simply superfluous. "Nothing is not so, nothing is not admissible." In other words, things are what they are: our decisions about them are irrelevant. This may be the reason why "goblet words" are placed in juxtaposition with "entrusted words" and "repeated words", despite being described much more obscurely and poetically: all three tropes focus on issues of authorization, though the nature of that authorization is quite different. The former two tropes were being described rather cynically, as a rhetorical mode by which to manipulate readers who put too much credence in authority; the third may be a different mode, one more radical and honest, which asks readers to see

<sup>13</sup>There is an implication in the word 自 of self-so-ness, or what in some cases is referred to as Heaven 天, but an explicit explanation is not to be found in such brief phrases.

beyond authoritative statements to the things themselves. When the text says, “goblet words come out daily, and harmonize with the heavenly divisions” this seems to be too broad, and too much of a natural process to be merely naming a kind of trope deployed here and there in the text of the *Zhuangzi*, as the first two are. (This may also be why no percentage occurrence in the text is assigned to the *zhiyan*, as for the first two.) Perhaps the assertion in this passage is that the historical Zhuang Zhou made particular use of this authorizing function of language (or else worked hard to highlight, and subvert it!) but that does not mean it is asserted as particular to him.

## 5 Conclusion: Authority in Tropes and Texts

Considering these passages in the light of textual criticism, the *sanyan* tropology forces us to consider the issue of authority in the *Zhuangzi* from multiple perspectives.

Considered purely in terms of their immediate context and direct proposals, all three modes circle around the issue of authority in communication. “Entrusted words” are passages fictionally attributed to someone other than Zhuang Zhou, in order to create trust among a readership that is either naïve, or perhaps simply just ill-informed due to conditions of textual circulation. “Respected words”, apparently a subset of the “entrusted words”, are those specifically attributed to famous ancient sages, whose canonical status and moral wisdom authorizes the dicta promulgated under their names. And the “goblet words” are language considered as illusorily self-authorizing, the source of distinctions which otherwise do not exist in a nature which would exist happily for itself and on its own terms, if we were to just allow it to do so.

Unnervingly, this tension between fictional attribution as the source of authority, and language as falsely authorizing, replicates the central problems of establishing the provenance of this passage, and its relations to the *Zhuangzi* as a composite whole. This passage is, by its own use of the first-person pronoun, and by explicit attribution in the *Tianxia* chapter, traditionally taken as being personally written by Zhuang Zhou, and offered here as an explanation of his own personal method of composition. Although there is no instance in the *Zhuangzi* of these tropes being named during use, or even used in a way that is clearly self-conscious, the *Tianxia* chapter not only attributes them directly to Zhuang Zhou, but thinks of them as central to his method, one of the most important things to be said about him in a brief précis of his work. At the same time, the only dependable link to a historical Zhuang Zhou who might have written some of the Inner Chapters is the text itself, and its intertextual appearance both here and in the “Discourse on Making Things Equal”. In addition, the particular portion of the text that has that clearest intertextual character is in fact the same passage locating language as falsely-self-authorizing.

Ultimately, the contradictory evidence here does not allow for a firm conclusion as to provenance of the *sanyan* tropology, at our current level of understanding of the *Zhuangzi*'s textual evolution. Context, position, and usage of the passage all argue for thorough skepticism despite the undeniable intertextual link to the heart of the Inner Chapters, which might be from the earliest stratum of the work. Nonetheless, even without knowing whether the historical Zhuang Zhou had definite links to this passage, one can draw two conclusions about how the *sanyan* relates to the reception of the *Zhuangzi*.

First, while the text was circulating in its late form, sometime between the late Warring States and the final recension of Guo Xiang, the issue of what makes an authoritative statement was a live one for readers. This fact is implicit in Guo's own division of the text into Inner, Outer, and Mixed Chapters, as well as his culling of what was perceived to be extraneous materials. Nevertheless, apart from such textual-critical questions, the *sanyan* discussion assumes an audience that thought highly of its own critical prowess. In order for the justification of false attributions to make sense, it is not enough that one has a readership that knows quotes attributed to Yao, or to Confucius, etc., to be fake. That audience also has to assume a different audience (either earlier, or excluded from the most secret teachings) who would have been taken in by such attributions. Without this assumption of a sophisticated readership able to imagine a naïve readership, the basic implied proposition ("I falsely attribute my doctrines to these authoritative figures in order to persuade readers less well-informed than you") does not make sense.

Second, we can recognize in the legacy of later interpretation an ironic tension between the different ways in which this passage authorizes, and is authorized by, a certain notion of Zhuang Zhou. A major reason why this passage, and this chapter, are now an important part of *Zhuangzi* interpretation is because they are the source of the modern word, "allegory" (*yuyan*), and because the *Zhuangzi*, insofar as it is considered in literary-historical terms, is thought of as the font of allegory for the Chinese tradition. As discussed above, "entrusted words" as described here have very little to do with "allegory"; one is a way of creating specious authority for doctrines, the other is a semiotic or rhetorical mode. Ironically, however, "allegory" is in part authorized for the Chinese tradition by being personally locatable in the historical Zhuang Zhou: hence, "allegory" (*yuyan*) is an accidental demonstration of "entrusted words" (*yuyan*). Moreover, that confusing fact demonstrates, in turn, the logic of the "goblet words", that language is ultimately the source of its own authority: most readers start from the conceptual category of "allegory" to try to make sense of this chapter. With reading, as with the world of objects, it is often our prior categories that cause misunderstanding.



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# Chapter 13

## Humor and Its Philosophical Significance in the *Zhuangzi*



Hans-Georg Moeller

### 1 Introduction: An Argument from History

There are not many early sources providing information on the *Zhuangzi* or its presumed author ZHUANG Zhou 莊周. The textual history prior to the edition of the received text by GUO Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 C.E.) is virtually unknown, and the anecdotal stories about ZHUANG Zhou found in some Han dynasty or earlier texts appear quite legendary in nature. Unearthed manuscripts from this time only preserve very small fragments of the text. Therefore, all theories about its origin, authorship, and composition are highly speculative. This being said, the few ancient sources still provide at least a glimpse, if not into the life and works of Master Zhuang, then at least into their reputation. Therefore, a historical approach to the book and its author may well focus on their *reception* rather than, as it has been more common in both traditional Chinese scholarship and in modern sinology, on an as of yet impossible reconstruction of their “true” nature or identity.

From the short entries on ZHUANG Zhou in his “biography” in sections 63: 9–10 of the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*)<sup>1</sup> at least three core features of a (if not *the*) common perception of him and his writings in ancient China emerge. First, he is identified as someone who followed the teachings of Laozi 老子, and thus, in current terminology, as a Daoist. Secondly, his uselessness as a political philosopher is emphasized: the *Shiji* complains that the politicians of the time

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<sup>1</sup>All references to ancient Chinese texts in this essay are to the website *Chinese Text Project* ([ctext.org](http://ctext.org)) if not indicated otherwise.

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“could not instrumentalize his teachings” (*bu neng qi zhi* 不能器之, 63: 9).<sup>2</sup> This point is illustrated by relating a famous anecdote about ZHUANG Zhou sarcastically declining an offer by the king of Chu to take on a government position (a similar narrative is included in *Zhuangzi* 32: 15; several others about Zhuangzi or others rejecting official posts are found throughout the *Zhuangzi*). Unlike the philosophers SHEN Buhai 申不害 or HAN Fei 韓非, whose “biographies” immediately follow ZHUANG Zhou’s in the *Shiji*, he is characterized as a sort of “rogue Daoist” who did not apply the teachings of Laozi administratively or politically. Instead, it is said, he was a highly prolific producer of literature who wrote “more than 100,000 words” consisting largely of poetic “allegories” (*yu yan* 寓言). Thirdly, and most importantly in the context of this essay, ZHUANG Zhou is singled out in the *Shiji* as someone who “mocked the followers of Confucius” (*di zi Kongxi zhi tu* 詆訛孔子之徒) and “flayed the Confucians and Mohists (*piao bo Ru Mo* 剝削儒墨 [Nienhauser 1994: 23]).” Three essays are explicitly mentioned as exemplifying such mockery: “The Old Fisherman” (*Yu Fu* 漁父), “Robber Zhi” (*Dao Zhi* 盜跖), and “Rifling Trunks” (*Qu Qie* 胠篋). These three titles also appear as chapter titles in the received version of the text so that it can be assumed that the respective chapters correspond to the *Zhuangzi* as it was known to the compilers of the *Shiji*. The image of Zhuangzi as a mocking critic of Confucian and other moral and political teachings of his times is confirmed in Xunzi’s 荀子 biography in the *Shiji* (74:11). Here, if one follows Shirley Chan’s reading of the expression *huaji* (滑稽) as *huaqi* (滑稽) in the sense of “humorists,” Xunzi is said to have dismissed Zhuangzi as someone “who attacked Confucian social conventions by being a humorist (*hua ji luan su* 滑稽亂俗, see Chan 2011: 232n11).”

The *Shiji* thus paints a pretty clear picture of Zhuangzi and his works: he was a Daoist, but unlike most other Daoists, or, for that matter, thinkers of the era, he did not formulate a practicable state philosophy. He is portrayed as a creative writer who refrained from engaging in theories of statecraft. His way of following Laozi consisted in the production of literature that made fun of mainstream ethical and political teachings and their representatives. The corresponding image of the *Zhuangzi* as a satirical and subversive text and “critique of the Confucians (Chong 2016)” is the earliest available historical view that we have access to today. It makes sense to regard it as a valid representation of how the *Zhuangzi* was understood in early China and provides a historical foundation for the following analysis of the *Zhuangzi* as humorous philosophical literature.

Since early times, the *Zhuangzi* has been regarded as an intricate work of literature. It exerted a considerable influence on the history of Chinese literature and its

<sup>2</sup>An anonymous reviewer suggests translating the word *qi* 器 here as “contain” or “accommodate,” “meaning Zhuangzi is big or superior beyond (...) imagination or tolerance.” This is a possible alternative interpretation. However, the word *qi* 器 is also commonly used, and translated, as “utensil” or “instrument,” especially in political contexts, and I understand it here as accordingly used in a verbal way.

humor was not lost to many readers and academics.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, the eminent modern Chinese writer LIN Yutang 林語堂 who coined the modern Chinese term for “humor” (*youmo* 幽默) in the 1920s (see Sample 1993, 2011), classified the Daoists, namely the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi*, as the “humorous faction” in the history of Chinese thought, as opposed to the “orthodox faction” of Confucianism and thereby revived the ancient perception of the text (Sample 2011: 174). Lin’s rediscovery of Chinese humor initiated a wave of satirical writings in the 1920s and 1930s as, for instance, reflected in the works of LU Xun 魯迅 and SHAO Xunmei 邵洵美 which demonstrate a modern literary appreciation of the *Zhuangzi*.

However, other approaches tended to dominate the reception of the *Zhuangzi* at various times. During the times of the Eastern Han dynasty in the first and second centuries CE an organized Daoist religion began to take shape. By the time of the Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE) it had evolved into a mainstream religion in China. By this time, the *Zhuangzi* was regarded as a major religious text and revered as a sacred scripture in Shangqing 上清 Daoism. The religious appropriation of the text is reflected in the new official title which was bestowed on it by Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 in 742 CE: *True Scripture of Southern Florescence* (*Nanhua zhenjing* 南華真經).

Along with the adoption of the category of “philosophy” (*zhexue* 哲學) in nineteenth century China and its subsequent institutionalization as an academic discipline and profession in the early twentieth century, the notion of a specific Daoist philosophy (in the modern academic sense of “philosophy”) was shaped. In this context, the *Zhuangzi* was taken to be a foundational work expressing basic metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological ideas of Daoist thought. This understanding is still prevalent in the contemporary academic reception of the *Zhuangzi*, both within China and globally. The present book in which this essay is published illustrates this categorization and conception of the text.

The philosophical respect and the religious veneration accorded to the *Zhuangzi* often lead to non-humorous interpretations. From both metaphysical and religious perspectives, humor may appear as all-too mundane. Until today—as the present book also documents—humorous readings of the *Zhuangzi* do not play a very prominent role in philosophically making sense of the text. The same can be said for the current literature which approaches the text religiously or spiritually: not much significance is ascribed to its wit and its puns.

Given the historical evidence outlined above, it is regrettable if analyses of the philosophical or spiritual significance of the *Zhuangzi* neglect its humorous aspects. The present essay attempts to address this problem and to reintegrate the historical understanding of the *Zhuangzi* as a humorous work which takes critical aim at Confucian and other early Chinese moral and political doctrines into a comprehensive philosophical (and, to a certain extent, spiritual) reading. While not denying the

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<sup>3</sup>For an overview of Western academic literature on humor in the *Zhuangzi* see Moeller and D’Ambrosio (2017).

validity of non-humorous interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*, an analysis that reads the text in a humorous key can still claim to continue a very long hermeneutic tradition.

## 2 Deconstruction: The Philosophical Function of Humor in the *Zhuangzi*

A famous and philosophically central, but admittedly not quite humorous, passage in chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* points out that a “sage” (*sheng ren* 聖人) does not “approach” (*you* 由) issues by either affirming (*shi* 是) or denying (*fei* 非) specific points of view, as the Confucians and Mohists often do and thus create endless strife and contention (see *Zhuangzi* 2: 5). For FENG Youlan 馮友蘭, one of the most eminent Chinese philosophers of the twentieth century, this passage provides a foundation for an understanding of the *Zhuangzi*, and of Daoism in general, as employing a “negative method” (*fu de fangfa* 負的方法, see Feng 2013) of philosophizing. According to Feng, this negative method looks at the theoretical debates of the times from a higher perspective and responds to them so that, as Feng says, the issues which Confucians and Mohists quarrel about are “dissolved” rather than solved (Feng 2013: 141). By performatively pointing out the dissolution of these issues, and thus the futility of identifying with specific points of view, the *Zhuangzi* avoids getting caught up in one-sided opinions, preferences, or dislikes. Seen in this way it provides relief and may heal the “bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language,” as Wittgenstein famously says in section 119 of his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953: 48).

I agree with Feng Youlan that the *Zhuangzi* operates with such a negative method which rather than taking sides and formulating doctrines about what is right or wrong cultivates a therapeutic disengagement from fixed beliefs about the world, and, importantly, about oneself. Other than Feng, for whom the *Zhuangzi*’s negative method constitutes a philosophy of silence, however, I tend to see the negative method as connected with a quite eloquent philosophy of humor. The “negative” philosophical function of humor, I believe, is to deconstruct the judgmental attitudes, “false” reifications, and personal identifications which go along with the adoption of fixed values, rigid sociopolitical convictions, and the formation of firm commitments to moral ideologies. “Deconstruction” here means that the *Zhuangzi* often presents argumentations and mindsets of Confucians (as well as Mohists and others) by humorous means such as irony, satire, or parody so that these argumentations and mindsets are at the same time reconstructed and undermined. This form of philosophical mockery comically subverts the credibility of philosophical and political “master narratives” and immunizes readers from internalizing them.

This method is not totally different from Socratic irony. In many of the aporetic dialogues in Plato’s works, Socrates, too, deconstructs the arguments and beliefs of his interlocutors and shows that while those may seem rational and true, they are actually irrational and untrue. As most famously shown in the *Apology*, Socrates

often ironically and paradoxically demonstrates the cognitive and ethical superiority of his negative knowledge of knowing not to know over the ultimately unsustainable knowledge claims dominating public and personal opinions in his society. In the *Zhuangzi*, however, there is no Socrates—here, we tend to find a deconstruction without a deconstructing subject or agent. Most of the stories and narratives, and even most of the dialogues, lack the figure of someone who, like Socrates, systematically analyzes an argument or belief and then shows its invalidity. Although Socrates often debunks all positive knowledge claims presented to him as false while not providing an ultimately correct one as an alternative, he still performatively affirms the role of argumentation as a methodological tool to distinguish true from false. The Platonic philosopher is on principle capable of establishing the truth, even if only, and provisionally, in the negative form of correctly eliminating falsehoods. *Zhuangzi's* more radical “idiotic” irony (see Moeller 2008), however, challenges the very cognitive and ethical mode of distinguishing between correct (*shi* 是) and incorrect (*fei* 非) judgments. Like a curious infant (*ying er* 嬰兒) or a baffled fool (*yu ren* 愚人), to speak in the poetic terminology of chapter 20 of the *Laozi*, the reader (or a Daoist interlocutor, like the character of Zhuangzi in the famous Happy Fish dialogue) cannot adopt the judgmental mindset which is fixated on distinguishing right from wrong. Instead, the reader, and the Daoist “sage,” typically remain playfully uncommitted to specific judgmental distinctions.

A crucial and frequently cited passage in the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (2: 11) illustrates this idiotic and non-committed irony well. Here, an ironic Daoist “sage” named Wang Ni, replying to a questioner, makes the idiotic point that he has no knowledge (*bu zhi* 不知, thereby making the whole dialogue an illustration of the first line of chapter 71 of the *Laozi*: *zhi bu zhi shang* 知不知上 or “Knowing not to know is the best.”). Ironically, paradoxically, and non-Socratically, Wang Ni’s not-knowing even extends to not-knowing that he does not know: “Do you know that you don’t know?” Wang Ni said: ‘How could I know that?’ (Ziporyn 2009: 17).” Wang Ni then explains his non-knowledge further with a simile:

When people sleep in a damp place, they wake up deathly ill and sore about the waist—but what about eels? If people live in trees, they tremble with fear and worry—but how about monkeys? Of these three, which ‘knows’ what is the right place to live? People eat the flesh of their livestock, deer eat grass, snakes eat centipedes, hawks and eagles eat mice. Of these four, which ‘knows’ the right thing to eat? Monkeys take she-monkeys for mates, bucks mount does, male fish frolic with female fish, while humans regard Mao Qiang and Lady Li as great beauties—but when fish see them they dart into the depths, when birds see them they soar into the skies, when deer see them they bolt away without looking back. Which of these four ‘knows’ what is rightly alluring? (Ziporyn 2009: 18)

A lot of ink has been spilled on discussing if this and other passages support a “relativist” or “skepticist” epistemology of the *Zhuangzi*, or any other kind of “ism” or “ology” (see Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996). Such readings often conveniently ignore the satirical aspects of the text which clearly indicate to a sensitive reader that Wang Ni neither tries to show that, *relative* to their respective perspectives, eels and monkeys do know the right place to live, nor hammers out a *skeptical* claim that one can never be sure of anything. What he actually points out is the ridiculousness of the

typically human existential and cognitive tendency to engage in bitter disputes on the basis of the conviction to be able to tell right from wrong.

It is funny to imagine how animals actually run away from someone who is widely regarded as a personification of sex appeal. This is a typically incongruous, surprising, irreverent and sexual-innuendo based humorous image that makes fun of the “celebs” of the era—and of the all-too common confusion resulting from being sexually attracted by someone. It is also funny and absurd to imagine, as the passage invites readers to do, that animals, like philosophers, would debate about how to live, procreate, and socialize “correctly.” The text is about the differing claims to know what is right and wrong with respect to the most basic aspects of life: eating, sex, and social bonds. Many philosophical and religious teachings, including, for instance, the Confucian tradition, have tried to enforce strict moral regimes on one or more of these activities. But rather than with Confucians and Mohists, the passage confronts us, ironically, with monkeys and eels who do not claim any wisdom in such matters.

Given its easily recognizable comical aspects (such as the implicit comparison between “wise” philosophers and “stupid” animals), the passage lends itself to be read as a satirical criticism of the ethical and ideological dogmatisms of the time and the ensuing conflicts and quarrels. Such an interpretation is also provided in the text itself by Wang Ni who concludes: “From my perspective, the fundamentalisms (*duan* 端) of humaneness (*ren* 仁) and appropriateness (*yi* 義) and the trails of right (*shi* 是) and wrong (*fei* 非) are hopelessly tangled and confused (Ziporyn 2009: 18, translation modified).” In other words which may perhaps better reflect the particular impudence entailed in the passage: Such pretentious moralist and dogmatic talk and behavior (and the defense of “isms” or “ologies” that may come along with it) is badly messed up.

The Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, which have been traditionally regarded as the philosophical core of the work, end with a concise but quite devastating deconstruction of dominant ethical and political narratives of the era, including Daoist ones. The short allegory of the Death of Hundun (*Zhuangzi* 7:7) can be read as a sarcastic parody of a cosmogenic myth. Two mythical emperors of the “North Sea” and “South Sea”—i.e., the border regions of the earth, are introduced with the mockingly comical and quite non-royal names Shu 儵 and Hu 忽, or “Fast” and “Furious”, as A.C. Graham renders them quite aptly into English (Graham 2001: 98). A third, and faceless, Emperor of the “center” completes the scenario of a primal world. His name Hundun 渾沌 refers to a mythological undifferentiated “chaos” out of which everything emerged. It appears in texts associated with the early Daoist tradition such as the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (14:1) and (in a slight variation of the name) the *Liezi* 列子 (2:1). Used in this way, it evokes an image of an awe-inspiring Daoist world-creating power. On the other hand, however, *hundun* can also mean “confused” or “chaotic” and have negative connotations.<sup>4</sup> Because of such incongruence

<sup>4</sup>It is used in this way, for instance, in WANG Chong’s 王充 *Lunheng* 論衡 (85:7): 卿決疑事, 渾沌難曉, 與彼分明可知, 孰為良吏? Alfred Forke’s translation which is included in the *Chinese Text Project* version of the text quotes here, renders *hundun* here as “confused”: “Now, would a magis-



and contradictory associations all three names in the story, and thus the characters bearing them, can be understood as comical. The short story simply states that the Emperors of the South and North intended to politely reciprocate the kindness with which Hundun had treated them by presenting him with a human face just like their own. Accordingly, they drilled seven openings into his body, and after their work was completed, Hundun died—and with this death of a mythical Daoist hero the Inner Chapters are finished.

Upon close inspection the story shows many of the hallmarks of comedy (see Moeller 2017): the pompous and moralistic language of the kings of the North and the South is betrayed by their ineffective deeds as hollow and stupid. They are thinly veiled caricatures of failed Confucian sages. And Hundun, too, is a comical figure. This “chaotic” and “confused” primal cosmic being lacks the wit to survive. He fails in the most basic of all the Daoist arts, namely (physical) self-preservation; he cannot last or be constant (*chang* 常), to speak in the language of the first chapter of the *Laozi*. The narrative turns out to be a parody of a mythological tale of world creation and social and ethical cultivation. It presents not only two unsuccessful Confucians, but also an incompetent Daoist who cannot avoid being pierced to death. In the form of a parody, the tale subverts the unconvincing myths of Confucian and Daoist “master narratives” that are supposed to support ethical and political doctrines.

The deconstructionist function of humor in the *Zhuangzi*, as these two passages from the Inner Chapters show, is to undermine rigid judgments about right and wrong and socio-political dogmas along with grandiose conceptions of ultimate origins which presumably provide such judgments and dogmas with legitimacy and authority. The philosophical method of humor, is, in this way, a negative method; it does not aim at replacing false distinctions between right and wrong with correct ones or provide alternative master narratives to replace existing ones. It allows readers—and this is the positive therapeutic function of humor in the *Zhuangzi* (which will be discussed in greater detail below)—to free themselves from existential and cognitive constraints of ethical doctrines and authoritarian mythological narratives and to experience comical relief and relaxation. Instead of confirming dogmas, it promotes playful living, thinking, and interaction with others. In the language of the *Zhuangzi*, this form of existential ease brought about by humor is called *you* 遊 or “rambling,” or “wandering,” as Ziporyn (2009) translates it (see Moeller and D’Ambrosio 2017). In this spirit, perhaps 遊默 (*youmo*) could have also been chosen as a Daoist transcription of “humor.”

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trate, who while deciding a doubtful case gives a confused (*hundun*) and unintelligent verdict, be a better official than another, who clearly distinguishes every point, and can easily be understood?”

### 3 Incongruity: The Mode of Humor in the *Zhuangzi*

There are various theories of the humorous and of laughter. A survey by Aaron Smuts states that “according to the standard analysis, humor theories can be classified into three neatly identifiable groups: incongruity, superiority, and relief theories. (Smuts 2015).” Among these, the superiority theory, which tends to view humor as morally suspicious or outright wrong is the “classical,” but also the most outdated one. John Morreall points out that “before the Enlightenment, Plato and Hobbes’s idea that laughter is an expression of feelings of superiority was the only widely circulated understanding of laughter (Morreall 2009: 6).” The relief theory became prominent in the 19th and in the twentieth century; proponents include Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud. It suggests that laughter allows physiological or mental energies to be discharged and provides relief from stress. However, as Smuts asserts, today “the incongruity theory is the reigning theory of humor (Smuts 2015).” In Morreall’s definition, “the core meaning of ‘incongruity’ in various versions of the incongruity theory, then, is that some thing or event we perceive or think about violates our standard mental patterns and normal expectations (Morreall 2013).” The incongruity theory is by no means incompatible with other theories, such as the relief theory or a related, but newer relaxation theory (Latta 1999). Morreall integrates a play theory of humor, which assumes that laughter evolved “from play signals in pre-human apes” (Morreall 2013), into the incongruity theory and identifies “the playful enjoyment of a cognitive shift” as “the basic pattern of humor (Morreall 2009: 49).”<sup>5</sup>

A very specific form of incongruity can be regarded as the source of much of the humor employed in *Zhuangzi*, namely the incongruity between “names” (*ming* 名), on the one hand, and “actualities” (*shi* 實) or “forms” (*xing* 形) on the other. In the Pre-Qin period when the *Zhuangzi* was composed, as well as in the following several centuries of the Han and Wei-Jin periods, normative ethical and socio-political discourses demanded congruence between “names”—such as designations within the kinship group (e.g. “father” or “son”), titles of political or administrative offices (such as “king” or “minister”), or honorific addresses connoting moral excellence (such as *junzi* 君子 for a “gentleman” or “exemplary person”)—and the actual performance of the roles indicated by these names (see Makeham 1994). Congruity demands underlie both the Confucian ideal of the “rectification of names” (*zheng ming* 正名) famously expressed in *Analects* 13:3, and Legalist (e.g. *Hanfeizi* 韓非子) and Huang-Lao Daoist (e.g. *Yinwenzi* 尹文字) statecraft philosophies which emphasized the need of a strict correspondence between *ming* and *xing* throughout society. Somewhat more radically than the Legalist and the Huang-Lao-Daoist texts, which focused on the mere conformity between role and behavior, Confucian texts such as the *Analects* and the *Mengzi* go a step further and demand an additional level of conformity: Not only what one does but also what one feels and thinks has to be in line with one’s socially ascribed function or identity. The *Zhuangzi*

<sup>5</sup> See Moeller and D’Ambrosio (2017: 60–71) for a more detailed analysis of these theories.

repeatedly challenges and mocks this strict congruity demand and the hypocrisy that inevitably results from it. Its humor is based precisely on comically exposing the incongruity between the expectations tied social identifications (names, reputations) and real human actions and feelings.

A paradigmatic fictional story in the Inner Chapters (*Zhuangzi* 6: 7) exemplifies this incongruity most directly: the tale of MENGUN Cai 孟孫才 who was regarded as the best mourner in Confucius' home state of Lu although he "wailed but shed no tears" and was "unsaddened in the depths of his heart, observing the mourning but without real sorrow" at his mother's funeral (Ziporyn 2009: 47). This "scandalous" state of affairs makes YAN Hui 顏回, Confucius's favorite student, quite exasperatedly ask his Master if it is really admissible to "get the name without the having the actuality (*wu qi shi er de qi ming* 無其實而得其名)." Confucius then justifies MENGUN Cai's reputation as the best mourner of Lu from a clearly Daoist perspective. In obvious philosophical continuity with many other well-known allegories and narratives in the *Zhuangzi* celebrating the equanimity towards death and the happy affirmation of the life-death cycle constituting the "transformation of things" (*wu hua* 物化) or, as an anonymous reviewer of this essay has remarked, the flowing of the same mass of *qi* 氣 (vital energy), Confucius praises MENGUN Cai as an "awakened" (覺 *jue*, Ziporyn 2009: 47) one who remains emotionally unperturbed even in the case of the death of a loved one.

The Daoist philosophy of death which informs Confucius's verdict is crucial for understanding the story, and I will discuss its relation to a philosophy of humor further down in this essay. At this point, however, I want to highlight the explicit emphasis on the incongruity between name and actuality—which, as Yan Hui rightly assumes, should make Mengsun Cai an insincere and therefore immoral person from a "mainstream" Confucian perspective. By openly embracing this incongruity, the character of Confucius in the story is ironically turned into an anti-Confucian.

The story deconstructs the paradigm of the congruity between names and actualities implied in the Confucian doctrine of the rectification of names. It is, admittedly, not very humorous, but it still employs irony and incongruity. However, its somber and highly poetical tone and, especially, the philosophical rationalizations and reflections by Confucius and Yan Hui, make the story a contemplative philosophical parable rather than a parody or satire. Whereas a humorous story performs and displays incongruity, the Mengsun Cai story explicitly discusses it. A joke which explains its pun is no longer funny—and for the same reason a philosophical narrative which analyses incongruity is not comical.

Despite its lack of humor, the ironical tale of Mengsun Cai's incongruous reputation provides the philosophical background for many comical tales throughout the *Zhuangzi*. More or less the whole fifth chapter of the *Zhuangzi* consists of satirical and otherwise funny stories about characters whose name and actuality or form do not match: they are cripples or criminals (or both at the same time, because legal punishment in ancient China often consisted in bodily mutilation), but some of them nevertheless take on high government positions or are otherwise venerated or adored. These characters are truly *carnavalesque*, to use the academically influential

concept coined by Mikhail Bakhtin (see Bakhtin 1990). They are grotesque, bizarre, and often physically monstrous figures in high rank or honor who sometimes satirically mirror the corruption and ugliness of the political and moral authorities. As exaggerated caricatures they reveal the hypocrisy, the vanity, and the folly of those who, like Confucius, are “seeking some bizarre, deceptive, illusory, freakish thing like a good name (Ziporyn 2009: 35)” to speak with Toeless Shushan, one of the cripple-criminals in this chapter.

## 4 Sanity: Medicinal Dimensions of Humor in the *Zhuangzi*

In his groundbreaking study *Myth and Meaning in Early Daoism: The Theme of Chaos (Hundun)* Norman Girardot concluded that the “best way to characterize the Daoist idea of salvation is to see it as being fundamentally ‘medicinal’ in intention and structure (Girardot 2008: 33).” I believe that Girardot indeed captures a very significant feature uniting many otherwise highly divergent religious, practical, philosophical, political, and aesthetic forms of Daoism. In the *Zhuangzi*, too, “medicinal intentions and structures” play a momentous role. Here, comical literature as humorous practice supports an overall project of maintaining or achieving existential, emotional, and mental sanity. As is commonly known, laughter is often the best medicine, and a fundamentally medicinal tradition such as Daoism surely could not ignore such a universal truth, as the *Zhuangzi* shows.

At least three levels of medicinal humor can be identified in the *Zhuangzi*: (1) A socio-political, and often satirical, humor that reduces “moral fear” and provides relief from repressive or hypocritical moral conventions and constraints. (2) A more psychological humor, often employing irony, which softens rigid self-conceptions, allows for dissociation from one’s socially ascribed roles by alleviating the pressures of a potentially overbearing “role model ethics,” and provides protection against conceit and narcissism as well as against despair and low confidence. (3) An existential humor, often allegorical and contemplative, which “puts things in perspective” and is primarily aimed at attaining an affirmative awareness of one’s own mortality, as well as of that of other living beings, and thus equanimity towards death. In combination, these types of humor foster the previously mentioned existential and mental ease that is named *you* 遊 or “rambling” in the *Zhuangzi*.

### 4.1 Respite from Moral Fear

An understanding of humor as a means to overcome “moral fear” was suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin (also transcribed as Mihail Bachtin) and is central to his conception of the carnivalesque. According to Bakhtin, the medieval European carnival as well as its ancient Greek and Roman predecessors provided a suspension of otherwise strictly imposed moral, religious, and political repressions and prohibitions

(Bakhtin 1990).<sup>6</sup> For a short period, a topsy-turvy world was allowed to take shape where the roles of the high and the low, the powerful and the powerless, were mixed or reversed. The differences between good and bad were blurred, and beauty and ugliness were intertwined. Queer and straight became indistinguishable. At the same time, otherwise unacceptable behavior such as uninhibited indulgence in sexual and other carnal pleasures became the norm. This reversal of the common order was comically and enthusiastically enacted and experienced as a liberation of both mind and body. Bakhtin writes:

The medieval person experienced in laughter the triumph over fear. And this triumph was not only experienced as a victory over mystical fear (the “fear of God”), and over the fear of the forces of nature, but most of all as the victory over moral fear, which subdues human consciousness, and suppresses and numbs it. (Bakhtin 1990: 35, my translation)

Next to the fifth chapter of the *Zhuangzi* with its array of “freakish” characters, the 29th chapter, entitled “Robber Zhi,” is probably the most carnivalesque in the book of *Zhuangzi*. As mentioned, the *Shiji* already listed it as representative of ZHUANG Zhou’s anti-Confucian mockery. The first part of this chapter is constituted by a long narrative about a meeting between Confucius and the notorious ancient Chinese villain Robber Zhi. In “regular” early Chinese texts, Confucius would be a moral exemplar, and Robber Zhi a personification of evil—but not so in this chapter. With almost cartoon-like exaggeration, Confucius is depicted as a presumptuous sycophant and scheming moralist while Robber Zhi is a virile and good-looking brute—“taking an afternoon snack of human livers” (Graham 2001, 235)—with an aggressive temper, an acute mind, and a cynical wit.<sup>7</sup>

Under the pretense of trying to morally reform Robber Zhi, Confucius effectively tries to flatter and bribe him into becoming a feudal lord. However, Confucius’s efforts are only met with scorn and ridicule by the robber who in no uncertain terms exposes Confucius’s hypocrisy and, in the form of a long rant, ironically reverses the standard historical narrative of the great Confucian-minded sages who civilized the world into a tale of continuous warfare, slaughter and corruption. The rant culminates in Robber Zhi’s ironic suggestion of an anti-Confucian “rectification of names”: “There’s no robber worse than you. Why doesn’t the world call you Robber Confucius instead of calling me Robber Zhi?” (Graham 2001, 237). In the end, Confucius is thoroughly humiliated and leaves the scene in utter defeat.

In truly carnivalesque fashion, the story dissolves the boundaries between good and bad and high and low rank. The robber within the sage is exposed as well as the sage within the robber. Both are thereby deprived of the awe they usually inspire. Confucius’s moral authority is devastatingly destroyed and Robber Zhi, a completely incongruent combination of attractive beauty and abhorrent behavior, of cultivated learnedness and profanity, provokes amusement rather than terror. In this

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<sup>6</sup>Bakhtin identified carnivalesque elements in the works of Dostoevsky and, in particular, Rabelais (Bakhtin 1990). I think that a comparative study of the carnivalesque in Rabelais and the *Zhuangzi* would be interesting.

<sup>7</sup>For a more comprehensive analysis of the story, see Moeller and D’Ambrosio 2017: 103–111.

way, laughter triumphs not only over the fear of evil bandits and murders, but, perhaps even more importantly, and just as Bakhtin says, over the fear of moral, religious, and political suppression of “human consciousness.”

## 4.2 *Protection Against Conceit and Despair: Overcoming a Role Model Ethics*

Roger Ames speaks of Confucian ethics as “role ethics” (Ames 2011). From the perspective of the *Zhuangzi* it makes sense to speak more specifically of a Confucian, or, even more generally, an early Chinese role model ethics. A, if not *the*, major rhetorical and didactical tool found not only in Confucian texts is the historical or anecdotal example. Very frequently, ethical and political teachings and doctrines are illustrated and, more importantly, promoted by narratives constructing some ideal characters one is supposed to emulate—or, to the contrary, negative examples that one is supposed to hold in contempt. The eminence of a role model ethics as arguably the most important moral methodology throughout Chinese history, i.e. from Pre-Qin times until today, is concretely manifested in primary educational texts such as the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü Zhuan* 列女傳) or the *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Ershisi Xiao* 二十四孝). These texts were supposed to teach young boys and girls how to become a perfect son or daughter, husband, or wife, etc. The fact that *zhexue* 哲學, the term chosen in the nineteenth century to translate “philosophy” first into Japanese and then into Chinese, was literally understood as “emulating the wise” (see Makeham 2012) demonstrates well the idea that modelling oneself after others was considered to be the standard method of self-cultivation.

Pressures resulting from demands (both by oneself and by others) to become an ideal son or father, or daughter or wife, can be immense. Expected sacrifices and commitments to one’s role, both mentally and physically (or, to use a term made famous by Michel Foucault that fits the context of role model ethics very well: “bio-politically”) can be overwhelming. A culturally pervasive role model ethics can have devastating effects on an individual’s mental and physical well-being. If one really identifies with, for instance the roles of the ideal wife or mother, or the ideal ruler or teacher, one can easily develop feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or incapability, or, to the contrary, vanity, arrogance, and smugness.

Many narratives in the *Zhuangzi* deconstruct the stereotypical role models that so many other philosophical and historical texts of its time take pains to erect. The Robber Zhi episode is a very good example for a humoristic “implosion” of a larger-than-life role model—in this case Confucius, the Master, himself—and its return to real life. Precisely because of its humorous nature, the often satirical “iconoclasm” found in the *Zhuangzi* does not serve the ideological function of replacing one set of values with a different one. Rather, it is part of a therapeutic exercise that allows readers to adopt a different, and *distant*, attitude to “sacred” texts and figures. The

carnavalesque deformation and defamation of many of the idols of the time—such as Confucius, but also Daoist idols such as Liezi (see Moeller 2016)—found throughout the *Zhuangzi* operates as an ancient Chinese version of Bertolt Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, i.e. as a “distancing” or “estrangement effect.”<sup>8</sup> The reader is no longer under the obligation to identify with the characters and can look at them, because of their comical or grotesque “distortion,” *critically*. They are neither positive nor negative role models; they need to be *neither adored nor despised*. This not only saves readers an emotional investment—one has to build up neither anger nor sympathy—and thus allows them to laugh, as Freud’s theory of wit (Freud 1922) would have it, but also liberates them from the expectation to try and become like others. One can look at the satirically “alienated” idols in all their madness and mundaneness and, perhaps, can rediscover some of one’s own weaknesses and strengths in them, and consequently learn to take neither overly seriously. Because of their comical estrangement, those characters release readers from their spell and set them free.

The quite humorous biographical anecdote about ZHUANG Zhou declining an offer to join the government found in the *Shiji* and, in a shorter form, in *Zhuangzi* 32:15 is usually, and correctly, read as illustrating the Daoist philosophy of preserving one’s physical health and integrity as associated with YANG Zhu 楊朱. In this story, Zhuangzi rejects a proposal to become a high-ranked official with an allegory: A sacrificial ox (as the royal courts keep them), Zhuangzi says, is beautifully dressed and well fed by the authorities, but when the time for the sacrifice comes, it may well wish to be a regular calf in the fields again. Taking on government positions in ancient China was dangerous and could well lead to being executed or murdered. Thus, the story can simply be said to indicate the “healthiness” of leading a simple rural life. However, the story’s humor is not the least produced by using a sacrificial ox as an image for government officials. This symbolism implies that people in socially prestigious positions, despite the fancy clothes they wear and notwithstanding their exquisite lifestyle, may actually be quite hollow and stupid—like an ox. Their exalted role may make them believe that they are really something special and better than others. However, in the end this can turn out to be an unwarranted error. The distancing effect works both ways; it not only diminishes undue respect for socially acclaimed authorities or worthies, but also cautions those who enjoy social estimation not to identify too much with the praise and respect they receive. A role model ethics can not only produce despair in those who are expected to internalize subservient roles, but also conceit in those who may feel entitled to internalize social success and acclaim. Humor and parody can serve to maintain sanity in the face of the temptations to develop illusions of grandeur and an inflated ego that may be posed by socio-political roles.

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<sup>8</sup>Interestingly enough, Brecht’s “invention” of the *Verfremdungseffekt* is related to his reflections on Chinese theatre inspired by Beijing Opera performances by MEI Lanfang 梅兰芳 (see Brecht 1961).



### 4.3 *Equanimity Towards Death*

Arguably the most important “ontological” theme in the *Zhuangzi*, and particularly in the Inner Chapters, is the “transformation of things” (*wu hua* 物化). Everything in the world comes into and goes out of existence, and thereby participates in a constant alternation between life and death. The many stories dealing with death and dying in the *Zhuangzi* often refer to this basic ontology in one way or another. Typically, these narratives do not primarily emphasize theoretical reflections on, let’s say, being and non-being, but rather the *existential* question of how to deal with human mortality. The tale of MENGSI Cai is an example of this practical focus on attaining a healthy mindset that allows one to overcome the general fear of death and, in particular, the extreme *distress* and despair that the presence of death—in the form of the death of a loved one or of one’s own imminent death—causes. Many religions and philosophies offer visions of an afterlife to address this problem and promise some form of immortality to provide hope or consolation. Chinese philosophies and religions at the time of the *Zhuangzi* were no exception to this rule. The Confucian tradition, too, assumed some form of post-mortal existence; it practiced ancestor worship and thus ascribed the kinship group with death-transcending powers. The *Zhuangzi*, however, and quite uniquely in its immediate historical and cultural context, does not “relativize” individual death: We all must die, and, like everything else, will be transformed into something radically different after death. The transformation of things is total and all-encompassing. The existential challenge is not to resist this change, but to affirm it not only as inevitable, but also as natural and, therefore, as productive.

The distancing-effect of humor allows for a dissociation from too rigid self-conceptions; it thereby also allows for an existential affirmation of one’s mortality. By taking ourselves not so seriously, we can let go of a narcissistic and egoistic—and of course entirely unfulfillable and thus ridiculous—desire for immortality. As an existential exercise the “ultimate” medicinal function of Daoist humor in the *Zhuangzi* is to become capable of accepting and affirming our own mortality and the mortality of those we love.

Dying as such is not funny, and the narratives about death and dying in the *Zhuangzi* are not satirical or cynical, but they show how a thoroughly practiced humor can foster an attitude of equanimity that extends to the most difficult of all existential tasks, to facing death. A well-cultivated humor—and the book of *Zhuangzi* can well be understood, as this essay tries to show, as an extended exercise of humorous practice—shows itself most vigorously in the capacity to accept one’s own ultimate dissolution. Therefore, the narratives about death in the *Zhuangzi*, while being neither jokes nor parodies, typically show—in a very un-Confucian manner—either the capacity to be “unsaddened in the depths of one’s heart” at a funeral and to “observe the mourning without real sorrow” as in the case of MENGSI Cai, or, more directly, *to celebrate death laughingly*. Not only the famous story about Zhuangzi singing happily after his beloved wife’s death (18:2) illustrates this well, but also the following nearly equally famous story from chapter six (6:5):

Ziji, Ziyu, Zili, and Zilai were talking. One of them said, “Who can see nothing as his own head, life as his own spine, and death as his own ass? Who knows the single body formed by life and death, existence and non-existence? I will be his friend!” The four looked at one another and laughed, feeling complete concord, and became friends. (Ziporyn 2009: 45)

The friends’ laughter is a result of their humorous existential cultivation. They are capable of dissociating themselves from their temporary self and to laugh about the carnival of transformation which incongruously overturns all hierarchies of things, mixes them together, and then separates them out again so that, as the friends imagine with poetic humor, their arms may become roosters announcing the dawn or crossbow pellets seeking out an owl to roast, just as their asses and spirits may become wheels or horses to ride along (see Ziporyn 2009: 45).

So, one may ask, aren’t these four friends and Zhuangzi after all Daoist role models that a reader is supposed to emulate, and isn’t the humorous attitude that the *Zhuangzi* fosters in the end not just another ethical prescription? Well—not quite, I would say. They are humorous, carnivalesque, “estranged” (or *verfremdete*), and queer Daoist role models whom one can “befriend,” as the story more or less directly invites readers to. One can enjoy them as artistic creations, as a character in a movie or a novel. But eventually, one will have to let them go, leave them behind, and *forget* (*wang* 忘) them, to use an important “existential” term from the *Zhuangzi*.

The point of humor is to engage in a playful mode of existence that is not committed to a “reification” of specific identities, roles, or even attitudes. As in child play, it allows one to “genuinely pretend” (see Moeller and D’Ambrosio 2017) and thereby, potentially, enjoy and healthily and skillfully enact, contingent roles or identities without essentially adopting them.

## 5 Conclusion

References to the *Zhuangzi* in the *Shiji* 史記, dating back to the first century BCE, indicate that from very early on the text was understood as having satirical, anti-Confucian tendencies. Throughout the ages, the humorous nature of the text, or at least of significant parts of it, has been frequently recognized. However, there have been few systematic attempts at outlining the philosophical function of the use of humor in this Daoist “classic.” This essay suggests a theoretical framework to make sense of its use of humor as a philosophical method that goes beyond the mere mocking of opposing philosophical views and traditions.

A prime function of humor in the *Zhuangzi*, it is argued, is to deconstruct and thereby subvert the credibility of philosophical “master narratives” of its time which were typically associated with Confucius and personalized in Confucius. Such deconstructions could enable readers to distance themselves from restrictive elements of the prevailing socio-political and cultural regimes. It helped them in building up a sort of immunity against the internalization of repressive practices and of the dogmas that were supposed to justify them.

In line with current theories of humor, incongruity can be identified as the key factor producing funny effects. The Zhuangzi frequently employs incongruity as a literary device to illustrate the incongruity between “names” (ming 名) and “actualities” (shi 實) or “forms” (xing 形). Whereas virtually all other philosophical positions of its era, including Confucianism, normatively insisted on the behavioral and psychological congruity between the social roles or identities indicated by “names” and their actualization by the bearers of such names, the Zhuangzi tends to humorously show actual incongruities. In a carnivalesque fashion, supposedly wise sages turn out to be fools and moral exemplars turn out to be deceptive and corrupt. At the same time, criminals appear as forthright and honest.

The purpose of humor in the Zhuangzi is not just to support a socio-political critique. What is more, it has a therapeutic effect. In a society full of social pressures and in the face of human anxiety, frailty, and mortality, it opens up avenues for respite and relaxation. Humor promotes equanimity and ease in the form of the Daoist existential mode of you 遊—a “carefree wandering.”

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## Chapter 14

# Those Who Fly Without Wings: Depictions of the Supreme Ideal Figure in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*



Shuen-Fu Lin

Translated from Chinese into English by Gang Liu

## 1 Preamble

In pre-Qin Chinese canonical texts, the supreme ideal figure with impeccable virtue and wisdom is usually referred to as the Sage (*sheng* 聖 or *shengren* 聖人). The *Zhuangzi*, however, is an exception. In this famous Daoist text, the supreme ideal has been referred to, in different contexts, as a Perfect Person (*zhiren*, 至人), a Daemonic Person<sup>1</sup> (*shenren*, 神人), or an Authentic Person (*zhenren*, 真人), in addition to the Sage. Most scholars, when discussing the meanings of these terms, treat them as synonyms used by the author(s) of the *Zhuangzi* to designate the same figure. Very few scholars believe that they refer to four different types of ideal figures with different levels of perfection.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I will first focus on depictions

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<sup>1</sup>I follow A. C. Graham (1919–1991) in translating *shenren* 神人 as Daemonic Person. Graham has borrowed the term “daemonic” from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) to translate *shenren*. Goethe says, “The Daemonic is that which cannot be accounted for by understanding or reason. In Poetry there is from first to last something daemonic, and especially in its unconscious appeal, for which all intellect and reason is insufficient, and which therefore has an efficacy beyond all concepts.” In borrowing the term from Goethe, Graham adds a cautionary note: “‘Daemonic’ seems to me to be the modern word closest to *shen*, but I use it with the warning that its restless, anguished quality is foreign to the Chinese word, not to mention the malign association which it tends to collect by confusion with ‘demonic’” (Graham 1986: 35, n 72). *Shen* is usually translated as “spirit” in English. For consistency’s sake, I render it “Daemon” throughout this article.

<sup>2</sup>YANG Chengfu includes a valuable discussion of these two divergent views between traditional and modern Chinese scholars. See Yang 1995: 55–56.

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of the Sage, the Perfect Person, the Daemonic Person, and the Authentic Person in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* to see whether they are used by the author to refer to the same or four different levels of a supreme ideal figure. I will then move on to discuss Zhuangzi's art of writing as manifested in these depictions. The interpretive strategy I adopt is that of close reading with an eye to addressing the larger issues around the Inner Chapters in early Chinese culture.

I choose to focus only on the Inner Chapters, mainly because of all the complicated questions of authorship, dates, and the work's compilation. Unlike past claims, it is now generally accepted that the *Zhuangzi* was not written solely by ZHUANG Zhou 莊周 (ca. 369–286 BCE), a contemporary of Mencius 孟子 (ca. 372–289 BCE). Many modern scholars believe that out of the thirty-three chapters in the extant *Zhuangzi*, compiled and annotated by Guo Xiang 郭象 (252?–312) during the Jin dynasty (265–420), only the seven Inner Chapters can be fairly attributed to Zhuang, whereas the rest were mostly written by his disciples or followers, and some even by persons entirely unrelated to Zhuangzi and his philosophy.<sup>3</sup> More recent studies indicate that even the Inner Chapters may contain errors or confusion caused by misplaced bamboo strips or tampering by compilers or annotators of later times. However, until a more ancient version of the *Zhuangzi* is discovered, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to make any convincing judgment regarding these textual issues. Apart from the textual issues, scholars generally agree that the philosophical views of the Inner Chapters are a self-contained system of thought that represents the core ideas of the book and various aspects of Zhuangzi's philosophy. The prose of the seven chapters conforms in style and is the most brilliant and critically acclaimed part of the book. Since the focus of my research is the book's literary value, I will follow the conventional belief, from a literary and philosophical point of view, that the Inner Chapters are works written by ZHUANG Zhou himself and use them as my sources to explore how he depicted his supreme ideal figure.

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<sup>3</sup> See Graham 1986: 27–36, Chapter 8, “The book *Chuang-tzu* and the problems of translation.” Regarding the authorship and dates of the Inner, Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, modern scholars have had many discussions, on which I will not go into detail here. To date, a reliable study of the authorship and dates of the chapters in the *Zhuangzi* can be found in the first half of Liu Xiaogan's 劉笑敢 book (Liu 1987). This portion of Liu's book was translated into English by William E. Savage under the title of *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* and published in 1994 by the Center for Chinese Studies at The University of Michigan. Liu argues that the *Zhuangzi* is a book that dates back to the Pre-Qin (i.e., pre-221 BCE) period. The division of the book into three parts was already there before the late Warring States period (5th-century–221 BCE) when the book was compiled. He argues that the Inner Chapters “are fundamentally a product of the mid-Warring States period, whereas the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters are mostly products of Zhuangzi's followers.” A revised edition of Liu's book was published in Beijing in 2010. This new edition includes additional details and footnotes to the main text, updates to the bibliography, and an appendix consisting of five articles about Liu's autobiography and Zhuangzi's philosophy as well as a review of his work on the *Zhuangzi*. A brief summary of his conclusions on the dating and classification of the chapters in this great Daoist text can be found in one appended article (Liu 2010: 394–397). In the introduction (Liu 2010: 6–21), Liu responds to the recent criticisms of the earlier work and indicates that he remains satisfied with the conclusions he has come up with.

## 2 The Variations on a Theme: Reflection on Zhuangzi's Writing Techniques

Before I examine how the Sage, Perfect Person, Daemonic Person, and Authentic Person are depicted, I will briefly discuss the occurrence of these four terms in the Inner Chapters. The word “Sage” appears in the Inner Chapters 29 times, “Daemonic Person” 4 times, “Perfect Person” 8 times, and “Authentic Person” 9 times.

The chart below shows how and where these words are used.

Term Chapters	Sage	Perfect Person	Daemonic Person	Authentic Person
1. Free and Easy Wandering	1	1	2	
2. Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal	10 (1x as “great sage”)	2		
3. The Principle of Nurturing Life				
4. The World of Humans	3	1	2	
5. The Sign of Virtue Complete	3	3		
6. The Great Source as Teacher	10			9
7. Responding to Being an Emperor or a King	2	1		

If these four terms are indeed used to mean the supreme ideal figure, then their frequent appearances in the Inner Chapters tells us much about how Zhuangzi valued and admired this ideal personality. From the chart above, we can see that the word “Sage” has been used the most, most likely because by that time it had already become a term commonly used to designate this kind of ideal figure. Zhuangzi might have just followed the custom of his time when adopting this word, but he gave it a meaning that was somewhat different from what other ancient Chinese thinkers used it to mean. The word “Perfect Person” is used only eight times in the Inner Chapters, one time less than the “Authentic Person,” but it appears in as many as five chapters, second only to the word “Sage.” The word *zhi* 至 can mean “reaching the ultimate.” In this light, the word *zhiren* 至人 (Perfect Person) can refer to a person whose spiritual cultivation has reached the highest level. In other words, the Perfect Person, when used to designate the supreme ideal figure, is not very different from the Sage, which probably explains why it appears so many times in the Inner Chapters, second only to Sage. It is worth pointing out here that “Sage” is used most frequently (ten times each) in two of the chapters, “Making All Things, and the Discussions on them, Equal” and “The Great Source as Teacher,” which may point to a connection between the two words “Sage” and “Authentic Person.” Moreover, none of the four terms is used in “The Principle of Nurturing Life,” which may indicate that this chapter has no direct connection to the theme of pursuing the ideal personality. I will discuss this more later, but for now I would like to point out that we should by no means overlook how Zhuangzi used the three words *shen* 神



(Daemonic, spiritual, marvelous), *zhi* 至 (reaching the ultimate), and *zhen* 真 (truthful, natural and without human effort) when we discuss the Sage, Perfect Person, Daemonic Person and Authentic Person, because these terms connect the different depictions of Zhuangzi's ideal figure across the Inner Chapters.<sup>4</sup>

The terms *sheng* and *shengren* can often be found in texts earlier than or contemporaneous to the *Zhuangzi*, but the other three terms "Perfect Person," "Authentic Person" and "Daemonic Person" were likely coined by Zhuangzi himself. Perfect Person and Authentic Person cannot be found in any texts earlier than the *Zhuangzi*. Perfect Person appears four times in the *Liezi* (列子) and twice in the *Xunzi* (荀子). Authentic Person appears twice in the *Liezi* and once in the *Lüshi chunqiu* (呂氏春秋, *Mr. Lü's Annals*). All these texts are dated later than the Inner Chapters. Daemonic Person appears three times in the *Liezi* and once in the *Guliang zhuan* (穀梁傳, *Guliang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*), in the following sentence, "In the past, there were Daemonic persons who could respond to heaven and communicate between yin and yang. (In drought seasons) the lord would lead his court officials to pray for rain."<sup>5</sup> According to an unverified claim made in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the *Guliang zhuan* was written by GULIANG Chi (穀梁赤) of the early Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), who "studied the Classics with Confucius' disciple Zi Xia (子夏, 507–420 BCE)."<sup>6</sup> If this claim is trustworthy, then Daemonic Person was possibly not coined by Zhuangzi but rather borrowed from the *Guliang zhuan*. Nevertheless, the meaning of the word in the *Zhuangzi* is quite different from that in the other text. As we shall see, Zhuangzi's "Daemonic Person" possesses fantastic powers resembling those of the shamans of antiquity. It was common for Zhuangzi to borrow words from ancient texts but change their meanings to express what he wanted to say. Although Daemonic Person appears only four times in the Inner Chapters (twice each in "Free and Easy Wandering"<sup>7</sup> and "The World of Humans"), the word *shen* 神 is used by Zhuangzi fifteen times across all the Inner Chapters. It is used mostly as a noun to refer to a

<sup>4</sup>In the Inner Chapters, the word "sage" is never used by itself or as an adjective.

<sup>5</sup>These few sentences can be found in the first year of the Dinggong reign in *Guliang zhuan* (穀梁傳定公元年). Here the meaning of the word *shenren* is different from "gods and men," the usual meaning of the term used in texts earlier than the *Zhuangzi*. In the *Guliang zhuan*, the *Liezi*, and the *Zhuangzi*, the word "daemonic" is used as an adjective (Fang and Yang 1927–1936: 2b–3a, book 22).

<sup>6</sup>The statements about the authorship of *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 and *Guliang zhuan* are unverified arguments dating back to the Han dynasty (Zhang 1985: 97–98). According to Zhang Dainian, both books were not "written" until the Han dynasty. In the light of this, it becomes questionable whether the word Daemonic Man was indeed coined by Guliang Chi 穀梁赤.

<sup>7</sup>In preparing this English translation of the article, we have consulted the following translations of the *Zhuangzi*: Fung 2016, Graham 1986, Mair 1994, Watson 2013, Ziporyn 2009. For the titles of three of the Inner Chapters, we follow Watson in "Free and Easy Wandering" and "The Sign of Virtue Complete" and Ziporyn in "The Great Source as Teacher." For most passages, we modified the translations done by Watson.

person's Daemon or spirit, or as an adjective meaning Daemonic, spiritual, or godlike.

In an article entitled "A Discussion on Zhuangzi's 'Cross-Referential Mode of Writing,'" the Chinese scholar SUN Yizhao 孫以昭 makes insightful comments on Zhuangzi's techniques for depicting ideal personalities. He says,

Zhuangzi uses two modes of cross-referential and complementary writing. One uses the same or similar language to reiterate important ideas and content in different chapters or in different parts of the same chapter, as can be seen in his discussion of seven concepts: "absolute freedom," "making all things equal," "life and death," "forgetting one's physical form," "following the course of nature," "non-purposive action," and "destiny" (Sun 1990: 281).<sup>8</sup>

The other is related to and yet different from this. There, Zhuangzi connects important ideas and content, turning them into an interrelated whole. Though these may not be reiterated in the same or similar language, they are connected within each chapter and complement each other in different chapters. The most prominent example of this can be seen in Zhuangzi's discussion on his view of life. In his thinking, the ultimate purpose of life is absolute freedom, that is, "depending on nothing." The supreme ideal figure, whether called a Perfect Person or an Authentic Person (but sometimes also a Daemonic Person or Sage), can "mount on the true course of Heaven and Earth, ride the changes of the six breaths, wander in the realm of the boundless," and roam freely in the empty and distant Not-Even-Anything Village (Watson 2013: 6). The following is a key comment Sun makes on this second type of cross-referential and complementary writing:

To achieve these great feats, one needs to realize that "all things are equal" and pursue "no-self," "no-merit," and "no-name." Specifically, one needs to "make one's virtue full" and "learn the Way." In "The Sign of Virtue Complete" and "The Great Source as Teacher," Zhuangzi discusses how one can "make one's virtue full" by "abiding by the Source," "preserving the origin," "wandering inside one's body," and "not revealing one's inner complete virtue." One can "follow the Way" by "abiding by the Source" and "sitting and forgetting." As we can see in "Free and Easy Wandering," Zhuangzi only gives us a brief view of how to achieve absolute freedom by "depending on nothing" and the three important roads to it, namely, "no-self," "no-merit," and "no-name." But he offers no specific argument regarding how one can "depend on nothing." The answer to this question will not be given until later in the book, in the chapters of "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal," "The Sign of Virtue Complete," and, especially, "The Great Source as Teacher." (Sun 1990: 285–286)

Sun provides a few other examples from the Inner Chapters to explain how Zhuangzi uses the same or similar language to discuss his key concepts, including absolute freedom. It goes without saying that Zhuangzi applies this mode of writing not only to his seven central concepts, but also to other concepts and themes in the Inner

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<sup>8</sup>The Chinese philosophical term *wuwei* 無為 (often rendered "no action," "non-action," or "doing nothing") means "taking no action that is characterized by a distinctively human purpose." My former colleague Donald J. Munro has aptly translated it into English as "non-purposive action" (Munro 1969: 142). That book was re-published in the series *Michigan Classics in Chinese Studies* in 2001.

Chapters.<sup>9</sup> According to Sun, the second type of cross-referencing is used to connect important ideas and content in the Inner Chapters into an interrelated whole. In the examples that he gives, Sun argues that Zhuangzi does not use the same or similar language to connect the passages, but this observation, in my view, is not entirely accurate. In fact, Zhuangzi also uses words and expressions similar in form and meaning (though not at the same level of similarity as the first type) to strengthen the interconnection of the Inner Chapters' theme and content. For instance, the passage in "The Great Source as Teacher" describes "sitting and forgetting," as follows: "I let my limbs and organs drop away, expel my hearing and eyesight, detach from my physical form, cast off knowledge, and become identical with the Great Thoroughfare." This imagery is undoubtedly connected to three other passages: First, the description of Ziqi of South Wall in "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal": "Can you really make the body like a withered tree and the heart like dead ashes?" Second, the cook's description of dissecting an ox in "The Principle of Nurturing Life": "I go at it by my Daemon and do not look with my eyes. Perception and knowledge have come to a stop, and my Daemon moves where it wants." And third, the "fasting of the heart" (*xinzhai* 心齋) in the "The World of Humans": "Do not listen with your ears, listen with your heart. No, do not listen with your heart, but listen with your breath (*qi* 氣)" (Qian 1989: 60, 8, 24–25, 30). In these passages drawn from four different chapters, the limbs and organs, physical form, faculties, and eyes and ears are obviously used to refer to the same things. Hearing and eyesight, knowledge, and heart are also closely connected. I will elaborate on that connection below.

In a discussion on the authorship of the Inner Chapters, the Chinese scholar LIU Xiaogan 劉笑敢 points out that these seven chapters contain "obviously more inter-related thought and language forms than the essays in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters." He argues, "This indicates that in the *Zhuangzi*, the seven Inner Chapters not only form a single type but are also most closely related with each other and most concentrated in philosophic content. Therefore, they should be viewed, generally speaking, as a complete unit" (Liu 2010: 41; Savage 1994: 31). In the same vein, SUN Yizhao argues that many sentences and ideas in the Inner Chapters are the same, similar, or interconnected. His "cross-referential and complementary mode of writing" describes the techniques Zhuangzi used to compose and organize his essays. Sun's argument enriches our understanding of the literary value of the Inner Chapters. In the conclusion to his article, he says,

The contents in the Inner Chapters where the cross-referential and complementary mode of writing is used cover almost all the important aspects of Zhuangzi's philosophy, the core of which is his view of life. The author carefully plans his writing, so that each chapter has its own central argument, but also connects with other chapters to form an indivisible unit. This makes it possible for some important ideas to be reiterated and re-addressed in different chapters and make them more interconnected, higher profile, and complete. From this we

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<sup>9</sup>For example, wandering, Not-Even-Anything Village, the use of the useless, dreaming, and the mutual generation of this and that can all be regarded as separate themes or sub-themes of some of the major themes identified above.

can see the consistency and integrity of the author's system of thought, which is truly ingenious and extraordinary! (Sun 1990: 286)

According to Sun, the essential elements of Zhuangzi's philosophy are expressed using this special mode of writing. Sun argues that, in terms of the structure, each of the seven Inner Chapters has an argumentative focus and therefore constitutes an independent entity, but because the seven chapters can also be read together, this enables us to view them as an integrated whole.

It is worth noting here that Sun was not the first scholar to make this observation. Many renowned *Zhuangzi* scholars since CHENG Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631) of the Tang dynasty (618–907), such as HANSHAN Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623), WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), XUAN Ying 宣穎 (early eighteenth century), made similar arguments. Those who admired the literary merits of the *Zhuangzi* paid special attention to the well-wrought structure and language of the Inner Chapters. HUANG Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), once said, “The seven Inner Chapters (reveal) an extremely rigorous structure; the remaining twenty-six chapters are but their commentaries” (Qian 1989: 1). XUAN Ying also said,

The seven Inner Chapters were all written after their titles had been carefully decided. We must first understand the intended meaning behind each chapter's title, and then we can examine the exquisite way in which the meaning permeates the language of the chapter. This is because once a chapter's title is decided, the entire chapter will focus on explicating its meaning; not a single sentence breaks away or deviates from it. Nowadays readers read each chapter in a fragmented and sporadic way, and thus cannot see this merit in Zhuangzi's writing. (1978: 7 a–b)

The value of SUN Yizhao's argument rests in his identification of one of Zhuangzi's most prominent and frequently used writing techniques, from a literary and philosophical perspective. Although XUAN Ying had already noticed that Zhuangzi used “repetitive or similar sentences” in different chapters, he treated them only as a method to express the “essence of the Way,” which “could not be uttered even with thousands of words” (Xuan 1978: 6 a–b, 7b). It goes without saying that, by comparison, Sun's analysis is much more sophisticated and thoughtful than XUAN Ying's observations.

It might be even more fitting to use an existing musical term, the technique of variation, to replace SUN Yizhao's “cross-referential and complementary mode of writing.”<sup>10</sup> In musical terminology, variation refers to “a special and simple composition technique, which directly uses different forms to repeat or reiterate the same major musical theme or melody” (Kang 1980: 1385). A broader definition is “a kind of repetition that keeps some parts of the original form of music, but at the same time deletes, changes, or replaces other parts.” What it keeps, deletes, or changes might be a theme, harmony, section and so on (Kang 1980: 1385). Because what is

<sup>10</sup> I have used the idea of the variation on themes many times in my discussion of Zhuangzi's art of writing. In my article (Lin 2008: 1–38), I provided a detailed explanation of this musical term. This article is now the third chapter of my book (Lin 2009).

changed is usually only a part of the theme, harmony or section, a person with good musical knowledge and training will not find it difficult to discern the original melody from its varied forms.

If we examine Zhuangzi's art in light of musical variation, we can not only identify the various cross-references and repetitions in the Inner Chapters, but also learn to appreciate his achievement as a prose writer. In a recent article, I discussed at length the artfulness of the prose in Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters.<sup>11</sup> Here I shall briefly recapitulate the main points. Zhuangzi's accomplishment as a prose writer is already recognized in the *Zhuangzi* text itself, specifically in Chapter 27 "Metaphorical Words" ("Yuyan," 寓言), and Chapter 33 "The World" ("Tianxia," 天下). The distinctiveness of his writing is described by the authors of these two chapters as embodied in three modes of discourse closely related to his ideas about language, life, and the world he lived in. Chapter 27 opens with these statements: "Metaphorical words make up nine tenths of it; weighty words (*zhongyan* 重言, or words of those whom people respect) make up seven tenths of it; 'goblet words' (*zhiyan* 卮言) come forth day after day, harmonizing things in the heavenly distinctions" (Watson 2013 modified: 234).

The author of "The World" (who most likely wrote his chapter after "Metaphorical Words") provides the following succinct comment: "He thought the world had sunk into turbidness and could not be spoken to in serious language. So he used 'goblet words' for unfixed rambling, weighty words to give a ring of truth, and metaphorical words to widen the range" (Watson 2013 modified: 296). As conceived by these two writers, *yuyan*, *zhongyan*, and *zhiyan* are not discrete, but overlapping, categories of diction. Literally, *yuyan* means "words that contain an implied meaning" (*jiyu zhi yan* 寄寓之言), a device for expressing ideas in indirect language. Metaphors in Zhuangzi's writings usually operate on the level of discourse and narrative rather than as individual terms. Further, many of his stories involve animal characters. Thus, the term *yuyan* involves both metaphorical language and fable, parable, or exemplum, because the latter are extended versions of the former. *Zhongyan* can literally be rendered as "words put in the mouths of those whom people respect," referring to stories in which wise persons—legendary heroes, ancient emperors, sages, and people from all walks of life, who have achieved high spirituality—are used as the author's masks so that his own words may carry more authority. The *zhi* in *zhiyan* is widely accepted to refer to "a goblet used for urging wine on a guest." This object was apparently an unusual vessel designed to remain upright when empty and overturn when full, thus illustrating the property of emptiness, a core value in Daoism. The goblet seems to have been chosen as a Daoist metaphor for the ideal use of the heart in relation to speech. "Goblet words" refers to speech that is natural, unpremeditated, always responding to changes in the flow of discourse, and always returning the heart to its original state of emptiness as soon as speech is completed. In the Inner Chapters, the discursive passages presenting the

<sup>11</sup> I am referring to "Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose: The Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*," which was included in *How To Read Chinese Prose: A Guided Anthology* edited by Zong-qi Cai (Cai 2022: 86–111).

author's seemingly random comments either on the stories or within them are examples of goblet words. There are also goblet words within the broader categories of metaphorical words and weighty words.

Each of the Inner Chapters is composed of a series of stories—fables, brief anecdotes, and parables—intermixed with passages of discursive prose. The three modes of discourse include the author's figurative language, his quoted words from other texts, stories he has made up himself, statements he has made in previous chapters, or anecdotes he has borrowed from common knowledge, myths, or folk tales. It must be noted that Zhuangzi seldom, if ever, simply quotes existing stories and texts, as was typical in the Confucian tradition, to express authorial intent. Instead, he always tinkers with them to shape them to his own philosophical thinking. His preference for metaphorical language is closely connected to his use of variation on themes in his work.

Before I delve into depiction of the supreme ideal figure, I need to point out a few things we should be aware of when adopting the notion of musical variation to discuss Zhuangzi's art of writing. First, music is fundamentally different from language or any other forms of representational art. It does not have meaning that can be conveyed through words, neither does it have an object such as those represented in arts like painting. Music may be viewed as a deeply structural discourse formed by the composer with a series of sounds, but this discourse does not have any fixed referentiality.<sup>12</sup> As early as the third century, Ji Kang 嵇康 (224–263), in his famous “Discussions on ‘Sound Has No Happiness or Sadness,’” already pointed out that “sound and emotion should be on different tracks,” thus breaking from the long-held belief in “interrelation between sound (tone, music) and human emotion” (Wu 2001: 567–601). Ji Kang noted that there was “no permanence in sound” and “no image in harmony,” that is, the sound in music has no certain or fixed connection with human emotion, and musical harmony “imitates or represents nothing” (Dai 2002: 185).<sup>13</sup> In Ji Kang's view, “since music does not express happiness or sadness, there is no distinction of happiness or sadness in music. The only distinctions in music are the (purely formal) ones between loud and soft, simple and complex, high and low, fast and slow, fierce and quiet, or good and evil” (Cai 1997: 342). It seems odd that Cai includes “good and evil” (*shan'e* 善惡) in the list, since moral judgments can hardly be considered purely formal distinctions.

Susanne K. Langer (1895–1985), an American philosopher of art active in the mid-twentieth century, also pointed out that music was different from human

<sup>12</sup> In discussing film music, American scholar Claudia Gorbman argues, “... [M]usic is a highly structured discourse of sound, but its freedom from referentiality (from language and representation) ensures it as a more desirable, less unpleasurable discourse” (Gorbman 1987: 6).

<sup>13</sup> In this book, Dai Lianzhang 戴璉璋 (1932–2022) provides an incisive explanation of Ji Kang's article (Dai 2002: 184–186). According to Wu Guanhong, the works *Lushi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 and *Huainan zi* 淮南子 had already pointed out that “The feelings of happiness and sadness are predetermined by the specific emotions of the person (listening to the music).” Therefore, there is no such thing as “a sound that makes me sad or music that makes me happy.” In light of this, the theory that “sound has no happiness or sadness” was in fact not invented by Ji Kang (Wu 2001: 582–583).



language in that its basic components (tone, sound) lack a system of “assigned connotation” (Langer 1951: 203). Words and letters in language all have fixed and customary designations, whereas tones and sounds in music do not have such things.<sup>14</sup> Langer suggested that music should be viewed only as a “significant form.” What it represented was a purely formal but contentless “morphology of feeling” (Langer, 1953: 32), expressing human experiences of emotion, the senses, and life. Although music does have import, this import can never be pinpointed.<sup>15</sup> In light of this, when we use the musical terminology to explain Zhuangzi’s art, we must bear in mind these distinctions between music and language. Hence, when Zhuangzi employed thematic variation in his writing, he did not merely want to create a form that would give his readers an aesthetic experience resembling that of music.<sup>16</sup> Due to the designated meaning in language, Zhuangzi adapted variation to serve other ends and generated specifically textual effects in addition to the formal beauty of the writing.

Second, although music itself does not have any fixed representational content or object, when it is used as background in operas and films, it gains other functions and meaning in addition to the “morphology of feeling.” Western (especially Hollywood) film music was greatly influenced by Richard Wagner’s (1813–1883) theory on theme and leitmotif in opera. “Leitmotif” is a musical phrase associated with a particular character, setting, or concept through repetition or reiteration. This musical phrase can be as complex as a melody or as simple as a few notes. “Theme,” on the other hand, refers to a salient musical fragment that is repeated, with variations, several times in a music piece.<sup>17</sup> As American film music scholar Claudia Gorbman points out,

According to the Wagnerian theory of theme and leitmotif, a film music theme is associated with a character, a place, a situation, or an emotion. It may have a fixed and static mark, or it may evolve into the main narrative, contribute to the dynamic flow of the narrative, and elevate its meaning to a higher level of signification. (Gorbman 1987: 3)

The “film music theme” here refers to a recurring musical piece, fragment, or a group of harmonic progressions, such as theme songs, background motifs, recurring melodies associated with certain characters or performed by them, or music that is

<sup>14</sup> Susanne K. Langer argues, “Why, then, is it not a *language* of feeling, as it has often been called? Because its [music’s] elements are not words—independent associative symbols with a reference fixed by convention” (Langer 1953: 31).

<sup>15</sup> “[W]hat music can actually reflect is the morphology of feeling.” “It (music) is a form that is capable of connotation, and the meanings to which it is amenable are articulations of emotive, vital, sentient experiences. But its import is never fixed” (Langer 1951: 202–203).

<sup>16</sup> David Sonnenschein, a contemporary American scholar who specializes in the study of sound in films, argues, “The foundation of listening is anticipation, seeking patterns and variations within expectation” (Sonnenschein 2001: 117). We can say that what we gain from listening is an experience of the harmonious beauty in music.

<sup>17</sup> Kathryn Kalinak defines “motif” and “leitmotif” as follows, “...[A] motif [is], a distinctive musical passage that is repeated (and varied) throughout a musical text.” “The leitmotif or leading theme is a musical phrase, either as complex as a melody or as simple as a few notes, which, through repetition, becomes identified with a character, situation, or idea” (Kalinak 1992: 15, 63).



not part of the film story.<sup>18</sup> When a musical theme recurs in a film, it can constantly remind the attentive audience of the context when it first occurred. In light of this, although music by nature is non-representational, the recurrence of a theme, accompanied by other representational elements in a film (images and speeches), can certainly give music certain “representational” meanings (Gorbman 1987: 27). In most cases, a musical theme recurring in a film does not simply repeat without changes, but often reappears in the form of a variation. In the same vein, when Zhuangzi used the same or similar words or sentences (or mere fragments of them) in a later chapter to convey a specific meaning or to represent certain content, the reader will be reminded of the meaning and content that have been conveyed or represented by these words or sentences before. This technique in Zhuangzi’s writing is, in my view, quite similar to the recurrence of the “theme music” in films.

Last but not least, we should not forget that when we discuss variation in music or film music, what we have in mind is usually the entire music piece or a film in its complete form. However, when we borrow this concept to discuss Zhuangzi’s writing, the subject of our discussion is only the core portion of the *Zhuangzi*, the Inner Chapters, as if it forms an integrated anthology of philosophical essays. Although many scholars believe there is inner coherence and a completeness to the Inner Chapters, they usually do not provide concrete evidence for this position but have only argued from the perspective of the Inner Chapters’ thought and language. And even if the Inner Chapters were indeed written by Zhuang Zhou himself and date to earlier than the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, we cannot prove, lacking a more complete ancient copy of the text, that the order of the chapters we see today is the same as in the distant past when it first circulated. Nevertheless, let us assume for the time being that the order of the seven chapters has not been altered since the book was composed, just for the convenience of discussion.

### **3 Depictions of the Supreme Ideal Figure in the Inner Chapters, Part I: “Free and Easy Wandering,” “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal,” “The Principle of Nurturing Life,” and “The World of Humans.”**

#### ***3.1 A First Statement of the Main Theme***

Now that we have covered the basic analytical concepts and problems, we can move on to discuss the depictions of this key figure in the Inner Chapters. In the extant version of the *Zhuangzi*, the Perfect Person, Daemonic Person, and Sage all appear for the first time in Chapter One, “Free and Easy Wandering.” After Zhuangzi tells

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<sup>18</sup> See Gorbman 1987: 26. “Music that is not a part of the story of the film” is “nondiegetic music.” “Diegetic music” are those songs sung by the characters in the film or the music played by the characters, bands, or radios in the film.

the story about the fish Kun, which transforms itself into the giant bird called Peng and migrates to the Southern Darkness, he uses the mockery of quails (little creatures who consider their extremely confined flight to be “the best of its kind”) to conclude the story. In the paragraph that follows, Zhuangzi changes his subject and distinguishes between four types of persons with different levels of achievement: the person who has sufficient knowledge and virtue to be a clerk; Song Rongzi who disregards people’s praise or criticism and knows the difference between inner and outer virtues; Liezi who can “ride on the wind to go wandering for fifteen days at a time” but seeks little worldly happiness; and an ideal personality who can “mount on the true course of Heaven and Earth, ride the changes of the six breaths, and wander in the realm of the boundless” (Qian 1989: 4).<sup>19</sup> Zhuangzi concludes this paragraph with the following comment, “Therefore I say, the Perfect Person has no-self, the Daemonic Person has no-merit, and the Sage has no-name.” Since Zhuangzi uses the phrase “therefore I say,” it is obvious that the Perfect Person, the Daemonic Person and the Sage all refer to the last (and also the highest) personality mentioned above, namely, the one who can “wander in the realm of the boundless.” To my knowledge, only one scholar, LUO Miandao 羅勉道 (dates unknown) from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), proposed a different interpretation to this concluding passage. He said,

Traditional commentaries treat these three parts of the comment as the conclusion of the previous passage. What they fail to see is that they are in fact used to usher in the following passage. The two types of persons mentioned previously are at the lower level of influence, whereas the three types of persons ranked here are at a higher level. A Sage is a person who transforms the world with his greatness. A Sage who is unfathomable can be called Daemonic. A Perfect Person is the ultimate form of the Daemonic. The levels of these three types of persons are also different from each other. If a person has no merit, he does not have any undertaking, how can he have any fame? If a person has no-self, he does not have a body, how can he ever have any undertaking? These are proven one after another in the subsequent passage. Xu You is a Sage. The person on the faraway Guyi Mountain is a Daemonic Person. The Four Masters are the Perfect Persons. (Luo 1974: 31–32)

Undoubtedly, Luo was trying to attract attention by being different, but he ended up proposing something quite absurd. Since Zhuangzi’s comment starts with “Therefore I say,” it is clear that he intends to draw a conclusion for his previous argument. Why would he use an expression commonly used for conclusion to start a new paragraph? Moreover, prior to this comment, Zhuangzi does not just “list and rank two types of persons,” but in fact lists and ranks four.<sup>20</sup> If the highest rank can still be

<sup>19</sup>“Mount on the true course of Heaven and Earth” is a modification of A. C. Graham’s translation of 乘天地之正 as “rides a true course between heaven and earth” (Graham 1986: 44). Since *zheng* 正 (literally, normality or usualness) refers to the way of Heaven and Earth, i.e., “self-so” or *ziran* 自然, in Zhuangzi’s usage as noted by GUO Xiang, it seems to me best to render it “the true course.”

<sup>20</sup>CHENG Xuanying 成玄英 has already discussed the four types of persons listed here. He said, “From the government clerks down to SONG Rong 宋榮 and YU Kou 禦寇, all are people with various levels of wisdom and virtue. None of them can be completely oblivious and they all rely on something. Only those who follow the nature of things and wander on the road of changes to

further differentiated and ranked, why does Zhuangzi not do so in the first place? In addition, for all the first three types, Zhuangzi provides specific examples in this passage, but he does not provide any example for the figure of the highest rank. If this comment is not the conclusion to the previous statements, then the fourth type of person will end up receiving no description at all. By using “Therefore I say,” Zhuangzi in fact signals that he will provide some makeshift names (i.e., Perfect Person, Daemonic Person, and Sage) for the supreme ideal who can “wander in the realm of the boundless.” Though these names are different, they refer to the same person or personality.

The sentence “A Sage is a person who transforms the world with his greatness” was borrowed by LUO Miandao from the *Mencius* (Zhu 1989: 407). Luo’s next line, “A Sage who is unfathomable can be called Daemonic” is possibly a misremembered quote from the same book, namely, “A person who is so sagacious that he cannot be known is called Daemonic.” It is also possible that Luo borrows the idea of unfathomability from a sentence in the *Book of Changes*, “He who cannot be fathomed by the principles of yin and yang is called Daemonic.” This he applies to the description of the supreme ideal figure (Wang and Kong 1965: 149).<sup>21</sup> Whether Zhuangzi indeed uses Mencius’ definition of the Sage is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that it is well within Zhuangzi’s capabilities to use the Perfect Person, the Daemonic Person, and the Sage to designate one and the same figure, the person who has obtained the highest level of achievement, extraordinary wisdom and virtue, and unknowable or unfathomable powers. Of course, this comment is only used to conclude a section of the chapter, not the entire chapter. Therefore, it also certainly functions as a link between the preceding and succeeding passages. But the conclusive role it plays in this part of the chapter must be acknowledged, not overlooked or misinterpreted.

A contemporary Chinese scholar, YANG Chengfu 楊成孚, has provided a cogent explanation of Zhuangzi’s using three different terms to denote the same type of personality. He does this by reference to the rhetorical device called *huwen yi zuyi* 互文以足義 (the former part and parts that follow in a passage conjoin to present a complete and unified meaning). Yang says,

*Huwen yi zu yi* is a device often employed in ancient poetry and prose. *Huwen* refers to the meanings of individual segments [of a passage] working in concert to reflect and complement each other. Thus, when reading a passage constructed in the *huwen* format, one must not rigidly adhere to (or follow the sequence of) the meanings of its individual segments. There are examples of the skillful use of this device in the *Zhuangzi*. (Yang 1995: 56)

After briefly commenting on an example from Chapter 15 “Constrained in Will” (*Keyi* 刻意), Yang continues,

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accomplish everything can completely grasp the essence of free and easy wandering” (Wang and Guo 1962: 20).

<sup>21</sup> CHENG Xuanying borrowed this sentence from the *Yijing-Xici zhuan* 易經·繫辭傳 to explain the meaning of the “daemonic person” in the *Zhuangzi*, “He cannot be fathomed by yin and yang, and therefore is called daemonic” (Wang and Guo 1962: 22).

The three individual segments starting with “The Perfect Person” make use of the *huwen yi zu yi* device, and the meaning they conjointly express is this: the Perfect Person has no-self, no-merit, and no-name; the Daemonic Person has no-merit, no-name, and no-self; the Sage has no-name, no-merit, and no-self. All three appellations carry these qualities because they designate persons who “mount on the true course of Heaven and Earth, ride the changes of the six breaths, and wander in the realm of the boundless.” .....

WEN Yiduo observed that “‘mounting on’ is the same as ‘riding.’ These two phrases are conjoined, complementarily expressing a unified meaning.” What Wen has said is right on the mark. “The one who wanders in the realm of the boundless” is a person who roams in the universe without any restrictions of time and space. “What does one have to depend on?” describes “a state in which one has no dependence” (*wudai* 無待). When one has no dependence, one is not restricted or controlled by any objective condition and thus will attain ultimate spiritual freedom. Only the person who does not have any dependence will be without self, merit, and name. To have no-self means “to break down the boundary enclosing oneself, eliminate egotism, and abolishing knowledge and desire to reach the state of communion with the spirit of Heaven and Earth.” To have no-merit means “to pursue no achievement.” To have no-name means “solely to take care of oneself without being obsessed with fame.” If one can attain these three, one will enter the ideal realm that transcends the ordinary—the spiritual free and easy wandering—and will become what Zhuangzi and his followers regarded as the supreme exemplary personality. Therefore, the Perfect Person, the Daemonic Person, and the Sage who have no-self, no-merit, and no-name can be regarded as multiple appearances of things under different names but with exactly the same content. (Yang 1995: 56–57)<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note that in a *huwen* construction, the segments (which can either simply be phrases or small but complete syntactic units) are usually cast in parallel grammatical structures. In the passages from “Free and Easy Wandering” under discussion here, “mount on the true course of Heaven and Earth” and “ride the changes of the six breaths” as well as “the Perfect Person has no-self,” “the Daemonic Person has no-merit,” and “the Sage has no-name” are good examples of this feature.

As we all know, “Free and Easy Wandering” describes the highest ideal life that Zhuangzi pursues, namely, absolute spiritual freedom. There is a saying in English: “Free as a bird.” Unlike birds, human beings are earthbound animals, unable to fly freely in the sky. In my view, the reason that Zhuangzi starts this chapter with the fable of the great bird Peng migrating from the Northern Darkness to the Southern Darkness is to make readers realize from the very beginning that he intends to use birds flying as a metaphor for freedom. We should always keep in mind that Zhuangzi is a highly skilled writer, and so we must be fully attentive to his words if we truly want to grasp their meaning. Here, although birds flying is a metaphor for freedom, it cannot be equated with the absolute spiritual freedom to which Zhuangzi

<sup>22</sup> As Yang Chengfu duly notes, the concept of *huwen yi zu yi* is borrowed from Wen Yiduo (Wen 1948: 241). Wen Yiduo does not define this important concept and uses it only to explain the linkage of two lines, “mounting on the true course of Heaven and Earth” and “riding the changes of the six breaths.” Neither Wen Yiduo nor Yang Chengfu say anything regarding the origin of this device. Wen Yiduo’s *huwen yi zu yi* is undoubtedly a rephrasing of *huwen xian yi* (a literary device in which two parts, one after the other, in a statement or passage work together to reveal a unified meaning). This can be seen in the similar meanings of the two parts. To my knowledge, the idea of a *huwen xian yi* device appears for the first time in Kong Yingda’s 孔穎達 (574–648) commentary on the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Gong and Wang 1999: 1458).

aspires. Hanshan 憨山 (1546–1623) of the late Ming dynasty pointed out, “The idea of free and easy wandering is merely used to describe the sage whose greatness can transform the entire world. Only a sage can wander freely and easily, and the story of the Kun and the Peng is made up to convey this meaning.”<sup>23</sup> Although Hanshan borrows the line “the sage is a person who transforms the world with his greatness” from the *Mencius* to illustrate his point, his interpretation of the Kun transforming into the Peng as symbolic of the sage’s absolute spiritual freedom may not be the best reading of this fable. Zhuangzi is very clear about this: The giant Peng must rely on the gale rising from the movement of the sea in the sixth month to travel to the Southern Darkness, because if the wind is not strong enough, it cannot hold up the bird’s wings, which are as big as “clouds hanging from the sky.” Furthermore, this giant bird travels only from the Northern Darkness to the Southern Darkness and rises up only ninety thousand *li* into the sky. Though the distance and height are enormous, these still represent limits and therefore are not comparable with the boundless realm where the supreme ideal figure can freely roam (Wang 1986: 392–393).

To help the reader understand more clearly the metaphorical meaning of flying, Zhuangzi compares persons who are capable enough to become clerks to the small swallows that can only flip-flap in a limited space. He then describes a man named Liezi who can “ride the wind” and wander in the sky for fifteen days before returning to the ground. Liezi’s ability to fly means that he is more capable than ordinary people, in the sense that he possesses a higher level of spiritual freedom. Nonetheless, Zhuangzi finds fault with Liezi: “Although he avoids walking, he still depends on something” (Qian 1989: 4). This is to say, Liezi still must wait for the wind to blow to ride it in flight, thereby avoiding being earthbound like an ordinary human being. His freedom is still limited by external conditions. Although Zhuangzi does not directly say this, the opposite of dependence is to be free from the constraints of any external conditions. Unlike both the Peng and Liezi, the supreme ideal figure, Zhuangzi suggests, can transcend all dependence and limitations. Although Zhuangzi continues to use words like “ride,” “mount” and “wander” to sustain the metaphor of flying as freedom, what the supreme ideal figure rides are not concrete phenomena like the wind, but abstract concepts such as the “true course” or “changes.”

This subtle change, from concrete things to abstract concepts, merits more attention. I agree with the modern scholar WANG Shusen’s 王樹森 argument that this change breaks through the limited freedom of flying accomplished by the Peng or Liezi (Wang 1986: 392–293). But if the supreme ideal figure does not need to rely on concrete things to wander, what are the “true course” and “changes”? Traditional commentators all adopted GUO Xiang and SIMA Biao’s interpretations of “he mounts on the true course of Heaven and Earth and rides the changes of the six breaths.” According to Guo,

<sup>23</sup> According to WANG Xianqian 王先謙 of the late Qing dynasty, “The gist of the ‘Free and Easy Wandering’ is to rely on nothing and wander in the infinite” (Wang 1987: 4).

Heaven and Earth is a collective name for the myriad things in the universe. The myriad things are the substance of Heaven and Earth, and their true course is none other than nature. This so-called nature is the natural course of things free from purposive action or intervention... Therefore, mounting on the true course of Heaven and Earth is to follow the nature of the myriad things; riding the changes of the six breaths is to wander on the road of changes. If one could wander like this, how would he ever encounter any boundary or limit? If he mounts on things like these, how could he ever have any dependence? This is the free and easy wandering of the person with absolute virtue who blurs the distinction between self and other. (Wang and Guo 1962: 20)

Although this comment carries the imprint of GUO Xiang's own philosophy, it nonetheless offers us aid for grasping Zhuangzi's elusive language. SIMA Biao regarded the "six breaths" as yin, yang, wind, rain, darkness and brightness (Wang and Guo 1962: 20), that is, the endless changes in the universe. If Guo and Sima's interpretations are correct, we can see that the supreme ideal figure can wander freely precisely because he can follow the nature of the myriad things and change as nature changes, and he can do this without depending on anything. Instead of directly using the word "independence," Zhuangzi skillfully poses a rhetorical question, "What would he have had to depend on?" to convey this layer of meaning. This question makes the reader think for himself, after which he will have no choice but to agree with Zhuangzi.

Zhuangzi's supreme figure, be it the Perfect Person, Daemonic Person, or Sage, is a person who has achieved this level of independence. As can be seen from YANG Chengfu's passage quoted above, the attributes Zhuangzi grants to this figure include "no-self," "no-merit," and "no-name." The surface meanings of these three terms seem to indicate that the Perfect Person does not rely on any such attribute to become the supreme ideal. In other words, he does not need strong self-consciousness or to eagerly pursue either merit or a name to complete his already perfect personality. A more in-depth explanation would be that this figure does not differentiate between self and other, nor does he pursue any worldly merit or achievement, and therefore cannot be granted any title or name. The indescribable Sage must be as selfless as the Perfect Person who has eliminated the opposition between self and other; he must also be as meritless as the Daemonic Person, who never intends to achieve anything in this world. From this we can see that the Perfect Person, Daemonic Person, and Sage are in fact all interrelated and referring to the same thing.<sup>24</sup> I want to especially point out here that when these three figures are

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth pointing out that CHENG Xuanying has provided a quite incisive explanation of these three sentences. According to him, "*Zhi* (perfect) is used to describe the essence, *shen* (daemonic) is used to describe the function, and *sheng* (sagely) is used to describe fame. Therefore, by saying that the essence is perfect, the function daemonic, and the fame sagely, Zhuangzi is in fact referring to the same person. This person is called perfect because he has reached the ultimate level in spirit; he is daemonic because he cannot be fathomed by yin and yang; he is sagely because he is able to give correct names to all things. These three attributes belong to one person but are made to appear as if they are three different persons to highlight the differences in achievement, function and name. These three types of persons are the very persons mentioned previously who can 'mount on the truth of Heaven and Earth and ride the changes of the six breaths to wander through the boundless.' In order to illustrate his virtue of relying on nothing and highlight his extraordinary essence

mentioned for the first time in the *Zhuangzi*, they are all given the ability to fly. This ability is often described with words like “ride or mount on” (*cheng* 乘 or *yu* 御) and especially “wander freely” (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊).

We can regard all these references to flying and wandering as variations on the main theme, to borrow a musical term, of the Inner Chapters. Indeed, wandering (*you* 遊) is one of the most important concepts in Zhuangzi’s philosophy, where it is used as a metaphor for the absolute spiritual freedom. No wonder in the Inner Chapters alone, the word “wandering” appears as many as thirty times, and most of these occurrences are associated with freedom. Even in “The Principle of Nurturing Life,” where none of the four appellations (Sage, Perfect Person, Daemonic Person, and Authentic Person) is used, wandering still comes into play: “There is plenty of room, more than enough for the blade to wander about in” (Qian 1989: 25). And the phrase “those who fly without wings” (Qian 1989: 31), used in “The World of Humans” to indicate an impossibility in its appropriate context, is in fact another variation on the imagery and concept of free and easy wandering from the first chapter.

### 3.2 *Reiteration, Alteration, and Expansion on the Main Theme*

The second time Zhuangzi mentions the supreme ideal figure in the Inner Chapters is also in “Free and Easy Wandering,” in the parable that opens with “Jian Wu asks Lian Shu.” Jian Wu complains to Lian Shu that he was completely dumbfounded at the talk of Jie Yu, a recluse known as “the Madman of Chu” in some ancient Chinese texts. Below is part of Jian Wu’s recounting of what Jieyu said in response to Lian Shu’s question, “What were his words like?”:

There lives a Daemonic Person on faraway Guyi Mountain. His skin is like ice and snow, and he is lovely and chaste like a virgin. He does not eat the five grains but inhales the wind and drinks the morning dew. He mounts the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas. His spirit is so concentrated that he can protect things from illness and plague and ripen the harvests. (Qian 1989: 5; Watson 2013 modified: 4)

Lian Shu responds to Jian Wu’s account with a fantastic comment that contains the following:

With his profound virtue, this man can embrace all things and roll them into one. Though the entire world cries out for him to rectify its chaotic state, what business is it for him to wear himself down over mundane affairs? Nothing in the world can harm this man. Though flood waters pile up to the sky, he will not drown. In a great drought that melts metal and stone and scorches the ground and hills, he will not feel the heat. From his dust and dirt you could mold a Yao or a Shun! Why would he consent to bother himself with mundane things? (Qian 1989: 5; Watson 2013 modified: 4)

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and function, the phrase ‘therefore I say’ is used” (Wang and Guo 1962: 22). Other than the argument “he is able to give correct names to all things,” which I do not think Zhuangzi would agree with, this passage indeed captures the gist of Zhuangzi’s argument in the three concluding sentences.



What the above two passages have in common is a detailed and vivid description of the Daemonic Person. Zhuangzi purposefully uses the same sentence patterns and expressions such as “ride,” “mount,” and “wander” to describe this person, echoing the three activities of the supreme ideal discussed above. It goes without saying that the Daemonic Person depicted here is the same figure introduced earlier. The difference, however, is that in the previous discussion Zhuangzi uses only abstract language and rhetorical questions to describe this figure, whereas here he creates a fictive character, the Daemonic Person from Guyi Mountain, and bestows on him skills and powers as follows: (1) He has the power to remain young; (2) he does not eat foods cultivated by humans but only absorbs the essences of nature; (3) he cannot be harmed by fire or flood and can protect living things; (4) he sees all things as one; (5) he does not burden himself with mundane affairs, even though from his very dirt one could form sage-kings worshipped by the Confucian scholars; (6) he can fly in the sky and wander without limit.

The materials Zhuangzi uses to fabricate this Daemonic figure come from ancient Chinese folk tales about shamans and transcendents.<sup>25</sup> This is an area in which YANG Rur-bin 楊儒賓 has done impressive research. Space does not allow me to discuss extensively the content of Professor Yang’s recent article, “Zhuangzi and the Eastern Coastal Culture of Shamanism,” but I will point to three points that are pertinent to the focus and argument of my own work here. In discussing Zhuangzi’s depiction of the highest personalities, Yang points out that they possess certain magical powers. He convincingly demonstrates that two magical powers, the ability to fly and the ability to protect things, are akin to those possessed by the shamans of antiquity. He also notes that from Mircea Eliade’s work on shamanism, we can see that these powers are also common to shamans in other parts of the world (Yang 2007: Footnote 19). The third point is the important role some mythical animals, and especially avian creatures, play in aiding shamans’ ascent into the sky (Yang 2007: 54–55). He explains that the gigantic Peng at the beginning of “Free and Easy Wandering” is derived from the ancient Chinese myth about the phoenix (*feng-huang* 鳳凰). Further, Yang explores the possibility that some of the *Zhuangzi*’s more mysterious figures (WAN Ni 王倪, Master Yier 意而子, and Zi Sanghu 子桑戶 or 子桑扈) might be personified versions of the mythical swallow *xuanniao* 玄鳥 (Mysterious Bird), the deified ancestor of the Shang people (Yang 2007: 56). Professor Yang supports his argument with a wealth of detailed and complex evidence from all sorts of sources. For my purpose, I would like to simply mention that the theme of flying seems deeply grounded in Zhuangzi’s knowledge of ancient Chinese shamanistic culture.

It is significant that Zhuangzi uses selected shamanistic elements such as those discussed above in combination with elements he himself has created such as “wandering in the boundless realm” and “rolling ten thousand things into one,” to create

<sup>25</sup> The Chinese term *shenxian* 神仙 has often been translated “deities and immortals.” It is true that once a human attains *xian*hood he or she will be able to live forever. But more importantly, *xian* denotes the transcendence of all ordinary human conditions. Thus I will follow the practice of those sinologists who have rendered *xian* as “transcendent.”

his own fantastic philosophical parable. We can see from the six skills/powers the Daemonic Person possesses that this being also has key characteristics of no-self, no-merit, and no officially recognized fame. It is quite clear that this passage represents Zhuangzi's first attempt in the Inner Chapters to use the technique of variation to re-play the theme of the supreme ideal figure. Here Zhuangzi chooses to give all these supernatural powers to the Daemonic Person, not to the Perfect Person or the Sage, possibly because the word "Daemon" is connected with mystery and unfathomability. The ability to fly is what connects the three passages in this chapter, though in the second and third passages the descriptive variation on these powers makes them stronger and more vivid.

The third variation on the supreme ideal figure can be found in a conversation between Nie Que and Wang Ni in "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal":

Wang Ni replied, "The Perfect Person is Daemonic. Were the great swamps to blaze, he would not be burned. Were the Yellow River and the Han River to freeze, he would not feel cold. Were thunder and lightning to split the mountains and gales stir up the seas, he would not be frightened. A man like this would mount the clouds and mist or straddle the sun and the moon to wander beyond the four seas. Even life and death cannot affect him, much less the sprouts of gains and loss!" (Qian 1989: 20; Watson 2013 modified: 15)

Zhuangzi uses the statement "The Perfect Person is Daemonic" to equate the Perfect Person with the Daemonic Person. It is beyond doubt that the Perfect Person has the same supernatural powers as the Daemonic person from Guyi Mountain. But the adjectives used in these sentences are slightly different, indicating that they are variations of the previous language. Significantly, in addition, Zhuangzi bestows another power on this Perfect Person, namely, immunity from harm by fire or flood, fearlessness in the face of lightning or gale, powers that Zhuangzi possibly borrowed from the shamanistic culture of the northeast coast. Finally, he says that since the Perfect Person has no worries about life and death, gain and loss, he certainly will not burden his heart with them. These details are all important additions to the description of the Daemonic Person. As for the ability to fly, Zhuangzi again uses phrases like "mount the clouds and mist" and "wander beyond the four seas" as well as replacing "rides a flying dragon" with "straddle the sun and the moon" to avoid repetition.

Immediately after the conversation between Nie Que and Wang Ni, an extended dialogue occurs between Ququezi and Changwuzi, in which Zhuangzi brings up the theme of the supreme ideal figure for the third time. To begin, Zhuangzi has Ququezi ask Changwuzi,

I have heard it from Confucius that the Sage does not occupy himself with mundane affairs, does not pursue profit or dodge harm, does not enjoy seeking for things or follow the Way. The Sage says nothing and yet says something, says something and yet says nothing. The Sage wanders beyond the world of dust and dirt. Confucius regarded these words as wild and impetuous, but I think they describe how the marvelous Way works. What do you think of them? (Qian 1989: 20; Watson 2013 modified: 15–16)

It is worth pointing out that Confucius in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* never represents the supreme ideal figure. Hence the Sage mentioned in this passage does not refer to him.<sup>26</sup> The phrases “does not occupy himself with mundane affairs, does not pursue profit or dodge harm” obviously echo the description of the Daemonic Person from Guyi Mountain, who would not “wear himself down over mundane affairs,” and the description of the Perfect Person mentioned by Wang Ni, who would not burden himself with “life and death” or “gain or loss.” In this paragraph, the only sentence that can be connected to the theme of flying is the phrase “wanders beyond the world of dust and dirt.” We can say that “within the four seas” is in fact another expression for the “world,” and the “dust” mentioned here is nothing but a reference to mundane affairs. Isn’t the phrase “wander beyond the world of dust and dirt” another skillful variation of the phrase “wanders beyond the four seas”? Since the Sage has the power to “fly without wings,” it goes without saying that the theme of flying is again brought up in this passage. In addition to this, there are a few other things that we should pay attention to in Changwuzi’s answer. He says,

I’m going to use reckless words to explain to you, and I want you to listen with a reckless heart. Why? To lean on the sun and the moon, with the universe tucked under the arm; to merge with things, leaving all confusions and uncertainties as they are; to look on slaves as if they are exalted and noble. Ordinary people strain and struggle; the Sage seems stupid and dumb. He blends ten thousand years and unites them into one. The myriad things all pursue their natural course and thus enfold each other. How do I know the delight in life is but a delusion? How do I know in disliking death, I am not like a young man who is lost and forgets the way home? (Qian 1989: 20–21; Watson 2013 modified: 16)

Although the description about leaning on the sun and the moon, tucking the universe under the arm, and merging oneself with the myriad things is different from that of “mounting the clouds and mist,” “riding a flying dragon,” and “straddling the sun and the moon,” the Sage described here, who has been given these powers and can “wander beyond the world of dust and dirt,” should not be that different from the Perfect Person or Daemonic Person. Because Zhuangzi has already given the theme of flying many meticulous descriptions in previous passages, here in the dialogue between Ququezi and Changwuzi, he only briefly touches upon it. By these varied descriptions of similar concepts and images across these passages, Zhuangzi manages to equate the Daemonic Person, the Perfect Person, and the Sage. This writing technique is similar to the leitmotif in film music, where it reminds us of the characters, stories, and special emotions associated with these musical themes.

“Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal” articulates Zhuangzi’s epistemology and view of the universe. The thrust of the chapter is to deconstruct

<sup>26</sup> In the Inner Chapters, Zhuangzi often uses Confucius as his spokesman. The writing technique used here is the *zhongyan* 重言 mentioned in the chapter “Metaphorical Language” as discussed earlier, that is, “to borrow words from world-renowned figures to speak for oneself.” In English literature, there is also a similar writing technique called “mask,” which may contain a negative connotation if translated into Chinese. “Mask” does not have such a negative connotation in English, so a more proper translation of it may be “spokesman.” For a discussion of the figure of Confucius used in the Inner Chapters, please refer to my article, “Confucius in the ‘Inner Chapters’ of the *Chuang Tzu*” (Lin 1988: 379–401).

the dualism in people's thinking and value system and help them realize that big or small, this or that, right or wrong, pretty or ugly, useful or useless, alive or dead, are all equal to each other. Needless to say, Zhuangzi's supreme ideal figure has already achieved this realization. Because language is a representation of this dualism, the Sage with absolute spiritual freedom will never fall into the trap of the binary oppositions, and can always wipe out their traces as he speaks or writes. This is what Zhuangzi means by claiming that he "says nothing and yet says something, says something and yet says nothing." The Sage is mentioned many times throughout this chapter. In addition to the three times in these passages, the Sage is referred to in seven other places. The first seven discussions of the Sage figure all have something to do with discourse, disputation, or knowledge. The conversation between Ququezi and Changwuzi also references discourse, knowledge, and values. The purpose is to bring forth qualities of the supreme ideal figure that have not been discussed before in these new contexts of knowledge and discourse. Let us briefly talk about those qualities here.

"Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal" begins with a story about Ziqi of South Wall being "in a trance as though he had lost his partner" (Qian 1989: 8–9). In this story, when Ziqi responds to his disciple, Yancheng Ziyong, he says, "Now I have lost myself," indicating that he has become a Perfect Person who has no-self. The true connotation of losing the self is to "make the body like a withered tree and the heart like dead ashes," that is, to free oneself from the restraints of sensory and mental activities. Only a person, who has reached such a selfless state, says Zhuangzi, can hear the "piping of Heaven." In Zhuangzi's terminology, the piping of Heaven is a metaphor for the Way; and hearing the piping of Heaven is to hear (i.e., know) the Way. Later, the acts of listening and hearing are again mentioned in a conversation between Confucius and Yan Hui where they talk about "the fasting of the heart" in the "The World of Humans," and in the conversation between Nüyu (Woman Crookback) and Nanbo Zikui in "The Great Source as Teacher." Both stories concern knowing the Way. Since Woman Crookback claims to have learned the Way of the Sage by "hearing it from the son of Fumo" (Qian 1989: 52–54), she has also become a Sage. Both Ziqi of South Wall and Woman Crookback represent supreme ideal figures in the Inner Chapters. We will later return for a fuller discussion of "hearing the Way" with more textual details. Suffice it to say here that in ancient Chinese classics, it is common for a Sage to be described as especially "capable of hearing," that is, having an extraordinary power to listen. This is different from Western culture, where sages or saints are usually depicted as having exceptional sight.<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to this convention, however, in "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal," the clear vision of the Sage is emphasized here and there. For instance, in a long paragraph (Qian 1989: 12–15) where Zhuangzi discusses the opposition of this and that, life and death, allowability and unallowability, and right and wrong, he claims that a Sage will never fall into the trap of binary oppositions,

<sup>27</sup> My former colleague, Kenneth DeWoskin, talks about this in his book on ancient Chinese music theories and thought (DeWoskin 1982: 31–37).

but will “illuminate all in the light of Heaven,” that is, see things in their natural way of being. Zhuangzi calls this act “using clarity.” Since a Sage can negate all oppositions by adhering to the “pivot of the Way” (Qian 1989: 13), that is, not falling into either side of a dualism, he can “walk two roads simultaneously” and thus see all things clearly. Zhuangzi describes the realm without binary oppositions as “not yet delimited,” not having any divisions (Qian 1989: 15–18). This is the realm of the Way, as represented by Not-Even-Anything Village (Watson 2013: 6) described in the concluding paragraph of “Free and Easy Wandering.” If the knowledge of a Sage has reached the ultimate level (Qian 1989: 15), then it must have already entered the boundless realm of the Way. This “ultimate wisdom” is rephrased as *zhenzhi* or “authentic knowledge” in “The Great Source as Teacher,” which I will discuss later.

Here I want to especially point out that the Sage is one who truly knows the “argument of no argument and the Way of no way” (Qian 1989: 18). The famous line about “saying something and yet saying nothing, saying nothing and yet saying something” in the conversation between Ququezi and Changwuzi describes an important quality of the Sage’s discourse. That’s why Zhuangzi introduces it here as a variation of the theme of the supreme ideal figure and uses it to supplement his previous depictions.

### 3.3 *The Inner Chapters That Contain No Depictions of the Supreme Ideal Figure*

Two of the Inner Chapters, “The Principle of Nurturing Life” and “The World of Humans,” contain no direct depictions of the supreme ideal figure. What can possibly be the reasons for this puzzling phenomenon? Historically, there have been two ways to interpret the Chinese title of the first, “Yang sheng zhu,” depending on the parsing of these three characters. If the first two characters are read together (i.e., Yangsheng zhu), the meaning of the title can be interpreted as a discussion of the principle of nurturing life. If the last two characters are read together (i.e., Yang shengzhu), then the meaning changes to a discussion on how to nurture the “principle of life,” which stands for the Daemon or *shen* within every person.<sup>28</sup> Actually, these two interpretations are closely related, because nurturing the principle of life is tantamount to nurturing life itself. For simplicity’s sake, I shall translate the title

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<sup>28</sup> Guo Xiang’s interpretation stands for the first type of reading. He argues, “Life is preserved through cultivation. This is the ultimate principle of life cultivation. If cultivation goes to the extreme and starts to hurt life, then it is not the principle of life cultivation anymore” (Wang and Guo: 115). The second type of reading is represented by Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (1193–?) and Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540–1620). According to Lin, “*Zhu* 主 is like the master in Chan Buddhism. (‘Yang sheng-zhu’ means) to cultivate that which rules over life. In (occult) Daoism, *zhu* refers to the so-called *danjin* 丹基 (the basis for cultivation in internal alchemy)” (Lin 1997: 47). According to Jiao, “The physical form is where life resides, while the spirit is the master of life. The way of emptiness is that which cultivates the spirit” (Jiao 1974: 128).

“The Principle of Nurturing Life.” Regardless of which reading is closer to the author’s original intention, it is clear that Zhuangzi does not mean to treat the supreme ideal figure in this chapter.<sup>29</sup> The second of these, “The World of Humans,” describes skills for living in society. The world of humans is the same as “the realm within the square” (*fang zhi nei* 方之内), a formulation put in the mouth of Confucius in “The Great Source as Teacher” (Qian 1989: 56). I will consider this expression in greater detail later.

“The World of Humans,” the fourth of the Inner Chapters, can be divided into seven sections,<sup>30</sup> three of which (the first two and the last) feature Confucius in a major role. Further, the key character in the third section is Qu Boyu 蘧伯玉 (fl. late sixth–early fifth century BCE), a counsellor in the state of Wei. He is praised by Confucius as a Superior Man (*junzi* 君子) who knew when to take office and when to remain a private citizen depending solely on whether the Way prevailed in his state or not (Lau 1979: 133). Except for the last section about the Madman of Chu, Jie Yu, mocking Confucius, which can also be found with slightly different details in the *Analects*, the two stories that involve Confucius and one that involves Qu Boyu are possibly all parables fabricated by Zhuangzi himself.

Since human society is what Confucius and Confucians were most concerned about, by using the “Confucius” and “Qu Boyu” figures as his spokesmen, Zhuangzi once again shows skill and playfulness in his writing. We can only assume that because these chapters focus primarily on the arbitrariness of the human realm and human concerns, Zhuangzi chose not to write about his supreme ideal figure here. It is most likely *not* due to some inadvertent omission of the words “Perfect Person,” “Daemonic Person,” and “Sage.”

It is worth noting, however, that the ideas of the Daemonic and wandering still play an important role in both of these chapters. The best way to nurture one’s life is “nothing more than following things as they are.”<sup>31</sup> Zhuangzi uses a fantastic story about a cook cutting up an ox as a metaphor for nurturing life. In response to a question from Lord Wenhui, the cook makes it clear that “What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond mere skill” (Qian 1989: 24–25; Watson 2013: 19). After three years of practice, when the cook begins to butcher, he can “go at it by my Daemon and do not look at it with my eyes. Perception and knowledge come to a stop, and my Daemon acts as it wills. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are.” The two most important phrases in this quote are “go along with the natural makeup” and “follow things as they are.” I agree with Zhang Mosheng’s interpretation that

<sup>29</sup> I should mention that I have included in my book chapter “Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose: The Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*” a close reading of “The Principle of Nurturing Life” (Cai 2022: 100–110).

<sup>30</sup> For the division of “The World of Humans” into seven sections, please see Qian 1989: 27–38 and Chen 1983: 106–142.

<sup>31</sup> This argument is made by CHEN Guying (Chen 1983: 93). It is worth pointing out that Chen follows LIN Xiyi and Jiao Hong’s reading and interprets the words *yangsheng zhu* as “preserving the master of life—the spirit.”



natural makeup here refers to the “natural coherence and structure of an ox’s body” (Zhang 1972: 87). With years of practice and experience, the cook finally gains a thorough knowledge of the natural coherence and structure of an ox’s body and can therefore cut it up without even using his eyes. The reason that the cook puts a stop to his perception and knowledge is to allow his Daemon to act freely. In this respect, the cook is just like Ziqi of South Wall for being able to free himself from the fetters of sensory and mental activities. The only difference is, the cook’s hearing ability is not emphasized here. The cook says that the blade of his knife remains as sharp as when it first came from the grindstone even after nineteen years of use, because “there are spaces between the joints, but the blade of the knife has no thickness. When you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, there will be plenty of room – more than enough for the blade to roam about in” (Qian 1989: 25; Watson 2013: 20). Here the blade of the cook’s knife symbolizes a person’s life or Daemon. Because the cook has reached the level of no-self, his blade has no thickness; because he does not need to use his perception or knowledge to carry out the act of butchering, we can argue that he treats the ox as his Not-Even-Anything Village (Watson 2013: 6) or the realm of the boundless. If this interpretation is not far-fetched, then isn’t the cook the same as the Perfect Person or the Daemonic Person described before, for all of them can freely wander in the realm of the boundless? Here, even though the language used does not resemble that of the previous passages it can still be viewed as a variation on the same theme, albeit hardly discernible. Of course, Zhuangzi does not directly say that the cook is the same figure as the Daemonic Person from Guyi Mountain. He instead uses the cook’s means of cutting up an ox as a metaphor for how a person’s life and Daemon can be nurtured. Lu Xixing 陸西星 (1520–1606), a Ming dynasty *Zhuangzi* commentator, made an eloquent argument about this metaphor,

All things have their own principles. If we deal with them in accordance with their principles, our Daemon will not be exhausted even after dealing with myriad changes. Thus, to take the story of the cook cutting up an ox as an example: The ox is a metaphor for the myriad things, and the blade of the knife represents our Daemon. How can the cook not wear out and get hurt after cutting up an ox? The reason is none other than that he acts in accordance with the principles inherent in the ox. (Lu 1978: 149)

This parable, then, does not describe the supreme ideal figure, but reveals how one can nurture one’s life by following the natural principles of things.

### 3.4 *A Crucial Transition in the Inner Chapters*

As WANG Fuzhi has pointed out, “The World of Humans” discusses mainly “the ingenious skills that can be used to protect oneself and others in a troubled world” (Wang 1984: 34). These skills include the fasting of the heart (a variation on the theme of no-self, as we touched upon previously), going along with things so as to



let one's heart wander freely, to resign oneself to what cannot be avoided, and to nurture what is within, outwardly adapt [to the wishes of the person you serve], and inwardly maintain peace and harmony, and discovering the great use of the useless. In the headnote to his translation of "The World of Humans," A. C. Graham has made the following incisive comment:

This chapter has two sets of episodes. The first considers the devious and intractable problems of the Taoist in office: to what extent can he live the enlightened life and hope to bring his ruler nearer to the Way? The second proclaims the advantages of being useless, unemployable, so that the government leaves you alone. (Graham 1986: 66)

The two sets of episodes are neatly distributed across the seven sections of the chapter, with the first set occupying the first three sections and the second set the last four. The first set presents three stories, each constituting a complete episode about a difficult situation in official life. In the first story, Confucius gives advice to Yan Hui, who is preparing to go to Wei with the hope of helping its imperious young ruler put his chaotic state in order—Confucius advises his most talented disciple to engage in a "fasting of the heart" (Qian 1989: 30–31). In the second story, Confucius advises the anxious Zigao, the Duke of She, who is being sent by the king of Chu to the state of Qi, "Just go along with things and let your mind move freely. Resign yourself to what cannot be avoided and nourish what is within you—this is best" (Watson 2013: 28; Qian 1989: 33). And the third story concerns advice given to Yan He who has been appointed tutor to the unruly crown prince of the state of Wei. Qu Boyu tells him, "Outwardly, it is best to adapt, and inwardly, it is best to maintain peace and harmony" (Qian 1989: 34). Although I will discuss "the fasting of the heart" (a concept of paramount importance) in fuller detail in a later part, it is beyond the scope of this article to go into these three episodes in depth. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Confucius and Qu Boyu are both used as masks to articulate Zhuangzi's own philosophy. Regardless of whether one seeks office or has already been in office, Zhuangzi thinks that one should practice "the fasting of the heart" so that one can become "selfless," accept things as they are, "make oneness one's abode and live with what cannot be avoided" (Qian 1989: 30). One must allow one's heart to wander freely, maintaining its peace and harmony. Particularly in the second story, Zhuangzi articulates his view through Confucius that "to understand what one can do nothing about and to be content with it as with destiny—this is the perfection of virtue" (Qian 1989: 32). This statement (with the phrase "to be content with it as with destiny" added to "what one can do nothing about," the latter is of course an altered version of "what cannot be avoided") foreshadows the stories in "The Sign of Virtue Complete" about those strange persons who are physically deformed but spiritually complete because of their contentment with destiny. The second set of episodes serves as a transition from "The World of Humans" to "The Sign of Virtue Complete."

### 3.5 *The Aesthetics of Usefulness and Uselessness*

Although the word “wander” appears five times and the Daemonic Person twice in “The World of Humans,” we do not find any description that puts wandering outside the limits of society. Even the mention of “those who fly without wings” is only invoked in a negative statement uttered by Confucius: “You have heard of those who fly with wings, but you have never heard of those who fly without wings” (Qian 1989: 31). In this chapter the Perfect Person is mentioned once and the Sage three times, but each instance occurs in a context where the author is persuading people not to actively pursue worldly fame or accomplishment.<sup>32</sup> Living in a chaotic age like the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), even a person as carefree as Zhuangzi must have known that it is not easy to truly wander freely. Little wonder, then, that he devotes the entire second half of the chapter to the theme of “uselessness.”

In the Inner Chapters, discussion of the concept of “use” (*yong* 用) first emerges in the final two sections of the “Free and Easy Wandering” chapter. One expression that appears in both instances is “there is no use for X” (*wu suo yong X*, 無所用X). The immediate association we can draw is that self, merit, and name in the ordinary sense are of no use to the supreme ideal figure.

The term *wuyong* 無用 (“useless,” “uselessness” or literally “[to have] no use”) directly appears for the first time in the last two sections of this Inner Chapter, both involving Zhuangzi and his logician friend Huizi. In the first of these, Huizi relates his experience of having received from the King of Wei some seeds of a gigantic gourd, which he duly planted. To Huizi’s utter distress, the plants grew and produced ridiculously large and unwieldy gourds that he could neither use as water containers nor as ladles when he split them in half. Consequently, he had to smash them to pieces! Zhuangzi first scolds his good friend for not knowing how to use big things and in the end suggests that Huizi make a gourd into a great tub for floating along the rivers and lakes.

In the very last section of the chapter, Zhuangzi continues to develop the idea of “bigness” but shifts focus from the gigantic gourd to a tree called ailanthus. Since this tree will become a major theme that receives significant development later in the Inner Chapters, Zhuangzi’s presentation of it here merits quotation in full:

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, “I have a big tree, which people call ailanthus. Its trunk is too gnarled and bumpy to apply an inked measuring line to, and its branches too twisted and crooked to match up to a compass or square. It stands by the road and carpenters will not even look at it. Now your words, sir, are big and useless, and so everybody rejects them.”

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<sup>32</sup> See “The Perfect Person of ancient times ensured that he had it in himself before he tried to give it to others. When you are not even sure what you have in yourself, how can you have the time to bother exposing what others are doing?” (Qian 1989: 27) “Even the sages could not refrain themselves from names and gains. How can you?” (Qian 1989: 28) “When the world has the Way, the sage completes it. When the Way is absent, the sages proliferate. As for now, all we can hope is to avoid punishment.” (Qian 1989: 38) The first two sentences are Confucius’ words said to Yan Hui as fabricated by Zhuangzi. The last is a mockery of Confucius by Jie Yu when he sang in madness in front of Confucius’ door.

Zhuangzi said, “Have you never seen a wild cat or a weasel? It crouches down, waiting for its prey. It leaps about, east and west, not dodging what is high or low, until it is caught in a trap or dies in a net. There is the yak now, big as the clouds hanging from the sky. It is certainly capable of being big, but it cannot catch rats. Now you, sir, have this big tree, and you are troubled because it is useless. Why don’t you plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village (Watson 2013:6) or in the Wild of Broad and Boundless, saunter aimlessly and do nothing by its side, or lie down for a free and easy slumber beneath it? Axes will never cut its life short, nor will anything ever harm it. If there is no use for it, how can it come to misery?” (Qian 1989: 6–7; Watson 2013 modified: 6)

The above is a spirited dialogue between Huizi, who holds to a narrow sense of the use and uselessness of things for ordinary practical purposes, and Zhuangzi, who maintains a broad perspective that recognizes all possible uses of things, including the fantastic ones only creative people like himself are able to come up with. As used essentially by Huizi, the term *wuyong* 無用 now appears in the four-character phrase *da er wuyong* 大而無用 (big but utterly useless), a comment Huizi uses in reference to Zhuangzi’s remark.<sup>33</sup> Huizi compares Zhuangzi’s remark to the gigantic ailanthus whose gnarled trunk and twisted branches have rendered it totally useless to the carpenter. The word *wuyong* used in Zhuangzi’s response points to Huizi’s inability to recognize the usefulness in what appears to be totally useless: precisely because of its uselessness, the ailanthus has been spared by the carpenter’s axe and allowed to live for a long time. It provides a long-lasting shade for the humans who enjoy sauntering past it or slumbering underneath. Further, Zhuangzi pokes fun at Huizi’s being troubled that the tree is useless and suggests ways to use it. The expression here, *wu suo ke yong* 無所可用 (rendered “[If] there is no use for it”), is undoubtedly a variation on *wu suo x* 無所用 X (“There is no use for x”) mentioned above. Most important for us to recognize is that Zhuangzi’s suggested use of something that appears useless at the ends of each parable clearly echoes the chapter’s main theme—wandering. In point of fact, the title “Xiaoyao (you)” (Free and Easy [Wandering]) is explicitly embedded in the sentences that bring the chapter to a close.

The theme of the useless tree is picked up in the first two of the second set of episodes in “The World of Humans.” Because Zhuangzi’s variations on this theme can best be appreciated in the details, I shall quote the two episodes in full:

Carpenter Shi went to Qi and when he arrived at Crooked Shaft, he saw an oak by the shrine of the local earth god. It was so big that it[s trunk] concealed an ox [residing beside it]<sup>34</sup> and measured a hundred spans around. It was so tall that its lowest branches towered seventy feet above the nearby hills; furthermore, a dozen or so of those branches could be made into boats. The onlookers were as many as those found in a market. Yet the ace carpenter did not pay attention to it and kept going without stopping. His apprentice looked at it until he was satiated and then caught up with Carpenter Shi and said, “Since I took up my ax and fol-

<sup>33</sup> This phrase is in fact a variation on *da er wudang* 大而無當 or “grand but with nothing to back it up” that appears in the aforementioned conversation between Jian Wu and Lian Shu.

<sup>34</sup> I follow Li Yi’s 李頤 (dates unknown) explanation for the line “其大蔽牛” as meaning “牛住其旁而不見” cited by Lu Deming (Wang and Guo 1962: 170).

lowed you, master, I have never seen timber as beautiful as this. But you, sir, didn't even bother to look, and keep going. Why?"

"Forget it, don't say anymore!" said the carpenter. "It's an ill-organized tree! Make boats from it and they'd sink; make coffins and they'd rot quickly; make utensils and they'd break in no time; make doors and they'd ooze dark sap; make posts and they'd be infested with worms. It's not a timber tree. There's no use for it, that's why it could have such a long life-span!"

After Carpenter Shi had returned home, the shrine oak appeared to him in a dream and said, "What do you compare me with? Do you compare me with fine-grained trees? Such fruit-bearing trees as the hawthorn, the pear, the orange, and the pomelo—as soon as their fruit is ripe, they are stripped and thereby abused. Their large branches are broken off, and small ones pulled around. These are the trees that make their lives miserable because of their own capability! Therefore, they cannot live out the years Heaven gave them but are cut off midway. They bring upon themselves the attacks of the worldly. It's the same with all things. Moreover, I have sought to be of no use for a long time. Although I almost died, I've now finally got it, and this is of great use to me. If I had been of some use, would I ever have grown so big? Furthermore, you and I are both things, so what's the point of one of us thinking it's only the other that is a thing? You are a 'desultory human' on the brink of death. What would you know about an 'ill-organized tree'?"

When Carpenter Shi woke up, he spoke about his dream.

His apprentice said, "If the shrine oak is so intent on being useless, what's it doing there at the shrine?"

"Shhh! Don't you say another word! The oak is merely making a lodging place at the shrine, letting itself receive the insults of those who do not understand it. If it weren't at the shrine, don't you think that it would have been cut down? It protects itself in a way different from that of the ordinary people. If you understand it by conventional standards, won't you be way off!" (Qian 1989: 35–36; Watson 2013 modified: 30–31; Mair 1994 modified: 37–38)<sup>35</sup>

....

Ziqi of Nanbo was wandering about the Hill of Shang when he saw a big tree there with extraordinary traits. A thousand four-horse carriages could have taken shelter under its shade. Ziqi said, "Wow, what tree is this? It must have extraordinary timber!" Looking up at its small branches, he saw that they were twisted and crooked, unfit for making beams and rafters. Looking down at the huge trunk, he saw that its grain was gnarled and loose, unfit for making coffins. He licked one of its leaves, and it caused his mouth to fester and ulcerate. He sniffed it and its odor was such that it could make a person wildly inebriated for three days. Ziqi said, "It turns out not to be a timber tree after all, and that is why it is able to grow so big! Alas, for this reason, the Daemonic Person does not let himself become timber!"

<sup>35</sup> This is adapted from the translations by Burton Watson and Victor Mair. I should like to mention that A. C. Graham translates *wenmu* 文木 "fine-grained woods" (Graham 1986: 73). I have rendered *sanmu* 散木 "ill-organized tree" to contrast my translation of *wenmu* 文木 "well-organized tree." The term *sanru* 散儒 appears in the "Encouraging Learning" (*Quan xue* 勸學) chapter of the *Xunzi*. It is possible that Xunzi was influenced by Zhuangzi's *sanmu* in coining his own term *sanru*. Burton Watson translates *sanru* as "desultory pedant" (Watson 1963: 21). I shall follow Watson in translating "sanren 散人" "desultory humans" literally, but with an emphasis on the sense of "lacking consistency and regularity" in my own use. It seems clear that Zhuangzi uses *sanmu* as a direct opposite of *wenmu*. *Sanmu* has usually been translated "worthless wood," "good-for-nothing wood," or "defective wood." But doing so loses the important contrast Zhuangzi tries to make.

Jingshi is a region in Song suitable for growing catalpas, cypresses, and mulberry trees. Those that are more than one hand's breadth or two around are cut down by people who are seeking posts to tether their monkeys. Those that are three or four spans around are cut down by people who are seeking lofty ridgepoles. Those that are seven or eight spans around are cut down by the families of nobles and wealthy merchants who are seeking planks for coffins. Therefore, not being able to live out the years given by Heaven—cut down midway by axes—is the trouble of timber. Conversely, in the sacrifices to dispel evil spirits, oxen with white foreheads, young pigs with upturned snouts, and people with piles cannot be offered to the god of the river. All of this is known by shamans who consider these creatures inauspicious. For the same reason, however, the Daemonic Person considers them to be greatly auspicious. (Qian 1989: 36–37; Watson 2013 modified: 31–32; Mair 1994 modified: 38–39)

These two episodes give extensive variations on the theme of the big useless tree first presented in the concluding section of “Free and Easy Wandering.” The introduction of this theme consists of a few basic traits: the outsized tree with a gnarled and bumpy trunk, twisted and crooked branches that no carpenter would look at it. These tersely stated qualities are greatly embellished here. The size of the trees is now extravagantly exaggerated: the trunk of one can conceal an ox while the shade of the other is so huge that a thousand four-horse carriages could take shelter in it, etc. The two gigantic trees are contrasted with fruit-bearing plants and other useful trees such as catalpas, cypresses, and mulberries. In Huizi's account, there is only the general observation that “carpenters do not bother to look.” But specific details are added in the variations. First, the “ace carpenter” named Shi pays no attention to the big tree, because he seems to know intuitively that it is unsuitable for construction of boats, coffins, utensils, doors, or pillars. When Ziqi of Nanbo (who is not identified as a carpenter at all) takes a close look at the shrine tree in the hope of discovering some “extraordinary timber” in it, he finds instead only qualities that are of no use to humans. Seeming to echo Carpenter Shi, Ziqi says that the tree is unfit for making beams or coffins. He licks a leaf of the tree and sniffs at it, both investigations that result in negative effects. Zhuangzi does not forget to let Ziqi take note of the tree's twisted branches and gnarled and loose grain to make sure this account resonates with a key element in the initial theme statement. The most important additions in these two episodes, however, are the distinctions between “well-organized trees” (*wenmu* 文木) and “ill-organized trees” (*sanmu* 散木) and those between “extraordinary timber” (*yicai* 異材) and “not timber at all” (*bucai* 不材). From a human perspective, a tree's usefulness or uselessness depends entirely upon whether its wood has fine grain, that is, extraordinary timber or rough and disorganized qualities that make it not timber at all.

Huizi, who introduces the theme, seems obsessed with the tree's being “big but totally useless.” It is Zhuangzi who points out that precisely because of the tree's size and uselessness, “axes will never cut its life short, nor will anything ever harm it.” Zhuangzi's side remark becomes a focal point in the two episodes in “The World of Humans,” albeit in altered form that goes in the opposite direction in meaning. The spirit of the big tree tells Carpenter Shi that fine-grained and useful trees all die an early and unnatural death, and similarly Ziqi observes that all timber trees meet with the fate of being cut down. The line “there is no use for it” (*wu suo ke yong*) in

Zhuangzi's remark appears verbatim twice again in the Carpenter Shi episode. Significantly, the spirit of the big tree regards complete uselessness to be of great use (*dayong* 大用). Although the line "there is no use for it" does not occur in the Ziqi story, its sense is never absent, only implied in the altered expression "not timber at all." It is significant that Ziqi concludes his comment with the note that the Daemonic Person does not let himself become timber, obviously because if he does he will meet with the same fate as do timber trees. Zhuangzi then extends the idea of "not timber at all" to deformed animals and humans with diseases, considered "inauspicious" by shamans for use in sacrifices to the river god. Again, Zhuangzi has the Daemonic Person weigh in with the comment that this inauspiciousness is in fact greatly auspiciousness for animals so deformed or diseased. Thus Zhuangzi wants his reader to know that the Daemonic Person clearly recognizes the true value of these creatures because their qualities have preserved them from worldly harm.

In the episode that immediately follows the two we have just discussed, Zhuangzi presents Deformed Shu who is contorted beyond all recognition. Below is the episode in its entirety:

There was Deformed Shu—his chin buried down in his navel, his shoulders higher than the crown of his head, his hair bun pointing at the sky, the accupoints for his five organs appearing on the top,<sup>36</sup> and his two thighs pressing against his ribs. By sewing and washing clothes, he earned enough to fill his mouth. By sifting grain with a winnowing basket, he made enough to feed ten people. When the authorities called out the troops, Deformed Shu waved his arms in the crowd. When the authorities drafted workers for a big project, they passed Deformed Shu over because of his chronic ailment. When the authorities gave out grain to the sick and disabled, he got three kegs of grain and ten bales of firewood. With a deformed body, he was still capable of nurturing himself and lived out the years Heaven gave him. How much more could he do if he had deformed virtue! (Wang and Guo 1962: 180; Watson 2013, modified: 32)

This variation on the "big and useless tree" theme takes it squarely into the human realm. One cannot fail to see Shu's extreme deformities as a fantastically altered version of the tree with a gnarled and bumpy trunk and bent and crooked branches. Because of his misshapeness, Deformed Shu is exempted from army or labor enlistment and can live out his span of life granted by Heaven. At the end of the episode, however, Zhuangzi acknowledges that while Shu has a deformed body he does not have "deformed virtue." In other words, he still does not measure up to the supreme ideal figure, and no wonder that Zhuangzi does not attribute to him the ability to fly.

"The World of Humans" closes with an episode in which the Madman of Chu (i.e., Jie Yu) sings a song at Confucius' gate, satirizing his (i.e., the Confucian Sage's) headstrong persistence in approaching people with virtue. His song contains

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<sup>36</sup>Normally the accupoints for a person's five organs are on his back. Because Deformed Shu's back is so bent, these accupoints appear "on the top."

this statement: “In times like the present, we do well to escape penalty” (Qian 1989: 38; Watson 2013 modified: 32).<sup>37</sup> The chapter ends with this:

The mountain trees bring plunder upon themselves, and the grease in the torch burns itself up. The cinnamon can be eaten, and so it gets chopped down. The lacquer tree can be used, and so it gets cut apart. People all know the use of the useful, but they do not know the use of the useless! (Qian 1989: 38; Watson 2013 modified: 32)

Thus Zhuangzi wraps this Inner Chapter with a pessimistic view that the human world he lived in was an extremely hazardous place in which the preservation of life through making oneself socially useless should be the most important concern for every smart human. Although the Daemonic Person is mentioned twice in “The World of Humans,” he is nowhere depicted as the supreme ideal figure who has attained the ability to fly. May we not suggest that this fact reflects not the author’s oversight but his careful artistic design?

## 4 Depictions of the Supreme Ideal Figure in the Inner Chapters, Part II: “The Sign of Virtue Complete,” “The Great Source as Teacher,” and “Responding to Being an Emperor or a King”

### 4.1 *The Aesthetics of Deformity*

The fourth direct and detailed depiction of the supreme ideal figure in the Inner Chapters is found in the first section of “The Sign of Virtue Complete”:

Chang Ji asked Confucius, “Wang Tai is an amputee, but he divides up Lu with you, master, for students. He doesn’t stand up and teach or sit down and discuss, but they go to him empty and come back full. Is there such a thing as teaching without words or a formless way to bring the heart to completion? What kind of person is he?”

Confucius said, “This master is a sage. I’ve just been tardy and haven’t gone to see him yet. Even I will treat him as my teacher, not to mention those who are not my equals. Why only the state of Lu? I will bring the whole world to follow him!”

Chang Ji said, “He is just an amputee, and yet superior to you, master. He must be far above ordinary people! For a man like that, what is the unique way in which he uses the heart?”

Confucius said, “Life and death are great matters, but they can bring him no change. Even if heaven and earth flip over and fall down, he will not follow suit. He understands non-dependence clearly and does not shift with things. He sees the transformation of things as destiny and holds fast to the Source.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Chang Ji.

Confucius said, “If you look at them from the point of view of difference, then liver and gall are as distinct as the states of Chu and Yue. But if you look at them from the point of

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<sup>37</sup> The story about the madman of Chu here is Zhuangzi’s parody of the similar anecdote in the *Analects* XVIII, 5. Zhuangzi alters the text in the *Analects* somewhat to suit his theme of uselessness.



view of sameness, then the myriad things are all one. A man like him does not know what is appropriate for his ears and eyes but lets his heart wander in the harmony of virtue.”....

Confucius said, “.... He will soon choose the day to ascend into the distance and people may just seek to follow him. Why would he be willing to bother himself with mere things?” (Qian 1989: 39–40; Watson 2013 modified: 34–35)

“The Sign of Virtue Complete” signifies that a person’s inner virtue (usually considered an innate power) is so full-blown that it will naturally manifest itself in external signs. To emphasize how important it is for a person to have fulsome inner virtue, Zhuangzi creates a group of physically deformed or ugly characters to stand for the supreme ideal figure. All the characters in “The Sign of Virtue Complete,” except Huizi and Zhuangzi, who only appear near the end of the chapter, are meant to be freakish figures: Wang Tai and Shentu Jia have lost limbs and Shushan No-Toes has had his toes amputated; Ai Taituo is a man whose “hideousness shocks the entire world.” Of all these figures, the most grotesque is a character known as Mr. Lame-Hunchback-No-Lips. What I must emphasize here is that all these deformed persons are, in fact just like Deformed Shu, variations on Huizi’s gigantic twisted and useless tree. The same can also be said of Nüyu (i.e., Woman Crookback)<sup>38</sup> and Ziyu (i.e., Master Carriage) in “The Great Source as Teacher” chapter.

In Chang Ji and Confucius’ descriptions of Wang Tai, we may notice many sentences that seem to elaborate on previously discussed passages. The line “When he stands, he does not teach; when he sits down, he does not discuss” reminds us of the conversation between Ququezi and Changwuzi about the Sage who “says nothing and yet says something, says something and yet says nothing.” The sentences “Life and death are great matters, but they can bring him no change. Even if heaven and earth flip over and fall down, he will not follow suit” remind us of the Daemonic Person depicted in “Free and Easy Wandering” and the Perfect Person in “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal,” who cannot be harmed by flood, fire or natural disasters. There is no major difference between “if you look at them from the point of view of sameness, then the myriad things are all one” and “the Sage seems stupid and dumb. He blends ten thousand years and unite them into one,” a statement by Changwuzi. And the line “Why would he be willing to bother himself with mere things?” clearly echoes a characteristic shared by the Daemonic Person and the Sage as depicted in previous chapters. Based on the theory of variations in music and leitmotifs in film music, it should not be hard to recognize these repeated ideas with their slight changes and elaborations indicate that the reader should see that Wang Tai is in fact a Perfect Person, a Daemonic Person, a Sage.

<sup>38</sup> Here I adopt Burton Watson’s translation of *nuyu* 女偶 as “Woman Crookback.” In the preface to his translation of the *Zhuangzi*, Watson mentions Fukunaga Mitsuji’s 福永光司 Japanese translation of the book (Watson 2013: xxx) and his rendering of *nuyu* as “Woman Crookback” can be found on page 46. Fukunaga’s translation of *nuyu* as “Woman Crookback” can be found in his *Sōshi Naihen* 莊子·內篇 (Fukunaga 1956: 253). In classical Chinese, there is a word *yulü* 偶旅, which is a synonym of *yulü* 偃僂, meaning crookback or bent body. See *yulü* 偶旅 and *yulü* 偃僂, respectively, in *Ciyuan* 詞源 (1988: 137, 133).

## 4.2 Terms Zhuangzi Uses in Relation to Flying

Does Zhuangzi also depict Wang Tai as someone who has the power to fly? The phrase *dengjia* 登假 (translated as “to ascend into the distance”) is certainly suggestive. This wording is found only twice in the extant *Zhuangzi* text (i.e., the Guo Xiang edition), once here in Chapter 5 and again in Chapter 6 “The Great Source as Teacher.” The Chinese character 假 used in both occurrences is usually pronounced *jia* in modern Mandarin Chinese and has the basic meanings of “false, borrowed, or if.” In the latter instance, the phrase appears in the line “*shi zhi zhi neng dengjia yu dao zhe ye ruo ci*” 是知之能登假於道者也若此 (He who has the knowledge to ascend and arrive at the Way is like this), and most commentators have taken 假 in 登假於道 to be the same in meaning and Old Chinese pronunciation as *ge* 格 (arrive at) (Wang 1988: 208). Since in this case *dengjia* is followed by *yu dao* 於道 (in or at the Way), it is plausible to take *jia* 假 as the same as *ge* 格. However, here in Chapter 5, there is no object that comes after *dengjia*. It is therefore problematic to read this *jia* as *ge* 格 (arrive at).<sup>39</sup>

In classical Chinese texts, the character 假 has long been pronounced *xia*, taken to be a pun for another character, *xia* 遐, meaning distance or a faraway place.<sup>40</sup> In my view, the succinct and authoritative explanation of the phrase *dengjia* in Chapter 5 is given by WANG Shumin 王叔岷 (1914–2008) in his commentary on the Wang Tai passage. He says:

It is said in the *Shiwen* 釋文 (i.e., *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 by Lu Deming 陸德明 [ca. 550–630]): “*Jia* 假 is pronounced *xia* 遐 here according to Xu Miao (徐邈, 344–397).”

Chu Boxiu 褚伯秀 (fl. 1246) says, “The meaning of *dengxia* 登遐 is quite obvious. It means that whoever masters this skill can ascend to a faraway and mysterious realm at will without being hindered by anything. The phrase *dengjia* also appears in the “Emperor Mu of Zhou” chapter in the *Liezi* (列子·周穆王篇) in which the character *jia* 假 is pronounced the same as *xia* 遐. This can be used as a proof.” As noted by Xu Miao, “*Jia* is pronounced *xia*.” *Jia* and *xia* were interchangeable in ancient times. In his commentary on Guo Pu’s 郭璞 (276–324) “A Rhapsody on the River” in the *Zhaoming wenxuan* (昭明文選·江賦), Li Shan 李善 (630–689) cites a remark from the *Zhuangzi*: “After he passed away, he (i.e., his spirit?) ascended into the distance, and three years later, his physical form had disappeared” (其死登遐, 三年而形遐).

In his comments on a passage in “The Great Source as Teacher,” Lu Deming cites this remark from Cui Zhuan’s 崔譔 (fl. late 3rd c.) edition of the *Zhuangzi*, a remark that does not appear in Guo Xiang’s edition. This same remark is quoted in the *Shiwen leiju*, the Former Collection, 49 (事文類聚·前集·49), with *dengjia* 登假 in it—this is also a proof.

Both *jia* 假 and *xia* 遐 are loan words for *xia* 霞 (rosy clouds). The chapter “Funerals and Burials” in the *Mozi* 墨子 states, “To the west of Qin there was a country called Yiqu 儀渠. When people’s parents die there, they gather firewood to burn the corpse. When the smoke rises, they say that their parents are ascending into the distance (*dengxia* 登遐).” Also see “Tang’s Inquiry” chapter in the *Liezi* 列子·湯問篇. In the chapter “Customs” in

<sup>39</sup> This is exactly what Guo Qingfan has done, taking *dengjia* as *dengge*, meaning simply “arrive at.” But he has not said anything about what follows it (Wang and Guo 1962: 214).

<sup>40</sup> The Tang scholar Lu Deming notes that Xu Miao 徐邈 (courtesy name Xianmin 仙民, 344–397) pronounces 假 as 遐 *xia* (Wang and Guo 1962: 196).

the *Liuzi* (劉子·風俗篇), this phrase is written as *shengxia* 昇霞 (literally, ascend into rosy clouds). *Deng* 登 and *sheng* 昇 have the same meaning. The vernacular form of *sheng* 昇 is *sheng* 升. According to the *Erya shi gu* 爾雅·釋詁, *deng* 登 means *sheng* 升.) In the “Far-off Journey” of the *Chuci* (Songs of Chu 楚辭·遠遊), *deng* (mount, ascend) is used in the line “I carried my bewildered soul and mounted rosy clouds” 載營魄而登霞兮. In “Qi Customs” in the *Huainan zi* (淮南子·齊俗篇), there is this line: “It is clear that he cannot ride on clouds and ascend into the distance,” in which “ascend into the distance” [written as *shengjia* 升假] and “ride on clouds” [*chengyun* 乘雲] are juxtaposed, indicating that *dengjia* (ascending into the distance) and *dengxia* (mounting rosy clouds) are the same. Here “choose the day to ascend into the distance” means to “choose a day to ascend into a distant and mysterious realm,” as Chu Boxiu has argued. In the “Discussion on the Transcendents” chapter of the *Baopuzi* (抱樸子·論仙篇), the line “ascending into the distance, never to return to the world” also means “ascending into a distant and mysterious realm.” (Wang 1988: 178–179)

In the second half of this elaborate and well-corroborated commentary, WANG Shumin exerts considerable effort to establish that *jia* 假 and *xia* 遐 are loan words for *xia* 霞. If his assertion is indeed valid, then *dengjia*, a pun on *dengxia* (mounting on rosy clouds), will be a direct and unmistakable variation on the phrase “mounting on clouds and mist” that appears in “Free and Easy Wandering.” Wang does not tell us, however, that the two texts in which *xia* 霞 appears are much later in composition than the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. The “Far-off Journey” of the *Chuci* is an early Han text while the *Liuzi* has been attributed to LIU Zhou 劉晔 (514–565).<sup>41</sup> Actually, the character *xia* 霞 (rosy clouds) is a word not found in extant pre-Qin texts at all. It is thus specious to argue that *Zhuangzi* uses *jia/xia* as a loan word for the rosy clouds *xia*, even though it appeared in this usage in texts from as early as the Han dynasty. It should be noted that despite his effort to establish *jia/xia* as said loan words, WANG Shumin still follows Chu Boxiu’s interpretation and in the end takes the phrase to mean “choose a day to ascend into a distant and mysterious realm.”

It seems likely that in the Wang Tai story *Zhuangzi* borrows the term *dengxia* from the *Mozi* but significantly alters its reference. While in the *Mozi*, *dengxia* pertains to smoke ascending into the sky from the burning of a deceased parent’s corpse, *Zhuangzi* unmistakably uses it to refer to that of the person Wang Tai. On

<sup>41</sup> Regarding the authorship and date of composition of *Yuan you* (Far-off Journey), David Hawkes says: “*Yuan you* could be described as a Taoist’s answer to *Li sao*. Without any of the political allegory or flower symbolism of *Li sao*, it describes a celestial journey which ends not in despairing gloom but in triumphant fulfillment. The journey is presented as the climax of a successful course of training in mysticism, and the poem is full of references to yoga techniques and to the hagiology of Han Taoism. The combination of Taoist mysticism with an enthusiasm for Chu poetry is a hallmark of the little groups of poets and philosophers who, in the second half of the second century B.C., under the patronage of LIU An [劉安 179–122 BCE], Prince of Huai-nan, produced not only the Taoist ‘Book of Huai-nan’ [*Huainanzi* 淮南子] but also the earliest edition of *Chuci*. Everything about *Yuan you* points to authorship by a member of this group” (Hawkes 1983: 191). The *Liuzi* 劉子 has been attributed to LIU Zhou 劉晔 (514–565). WANG Shumin has compiled an annotated edition of this book (Wang 1961), published by the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica, Taipei, and written a long preface to the work with a thorough discussion of the author (Wang 1962: 1–18).

the lexical level, *dengxia* basically means ascending far up into the sky, signifying something like levitation rather than flying per se. The character *deng* appears five times in the Inner Chapters, the first time in combination with *jia* in “The Sign of Virtue Complete,” and the remaining four times in “The Great Source as Teacher” in combinations with *gao* 高 (height), *jia* (the same term we have been discussing), *yuntian* 雲天 (clouds and sky), and *tian* (sky). We will discuss these four occurrences of *deng* in passages of “The Great Source as Teacher” in fuller detail below. Suffice it to say here that with the exception of “ascending a height,” all these combinations are about rising into the sky. The last occurrence is in the line *deng tian you wu* 登天遊霧 (ascending into the sky to wander in the mists). Here *deng* is clearly associated with flight.

Perhaps then, Zhuangzi uses *deng* to indicate levitation or ascending into the sky, an action preceding that of wandering (*you* 遊) or flying proper. Let us examine the following short passages describing avian creatures from the opening parts of “Free and Easy Wandering:”

1. He (i.e., the Peng bird) spirals up ninety thousand *li* in the whirlwind and is gone six months before he rests.<sup>42</sup> (搏扶搖而上者九萬里，去以六月息者也。) (Qian 1989: 1)

1a. He (i.e., the Peng bird) spirals up ninety thousand *li* in the ram’s horn of a whirlwind, cutting through the clouds and mist, with the blue sky on its back, and then he sets off for the south, toward the Southern Darkness. (搏扶搖羊角而上者九萬里，絕雲氣，負青天，然後圖南，且適南冥也。) (Qian 1989: 3)

2. When we (i.e., cicada and little dove) swiftly rise up and fly off, we can get as far as the elm or the sapanwood tree, but sometimes we don’t make it and just fall to the ground. (我決起而飛，搶榆枋，時則不至而控於地而已矣) (Qian 1989: 2; Watson 2013 modified: 1–2)

2a. When I (i.e., little quail) leap up, I never get beyond a dozen yards before I come down, fluttering among fleabane and mugwort—this is itself the best kind of flying anyway. (我騰躍而上，不過數仞而下，翱翔蓬蒿之間，此亦飛之至也。) (Qian 1989: 3; Watson 2013 modified: 2)

Here, I have used 1a and 2a to designate the passages that are obviously variations on 1 and 2, respectively. Brief as it is, the line “ascending into the sky to wander in the mists” is a good parallel to the lines depicting the motions of the Peng bird and other avian beings. We can thus see that “ascending into the distance” serves as a marvelous contrast to the motions of creatures described in the above quoted passages. As for the descriptions of flight itself, Zhuangzi consistently saves such

<sup>42</sup> The second clause in this sentence can (and has been taken by scholars to) mean “and takes off availing itself of the gale that rises up in the sixth month.” It is possible that Zhuangzi means to involve a double meaning for each of the two terms 六月 and 息. The former can mean both “six months” and “the sixth month,” while the latter means both “(to) rest” and “the breath (hence ‘gale’).” Unfortunately, there is no way the double meanings can be retained in the English translation.

phrases as “ride or mount the clouds” and “wander freely in the boundless realm” for the supreme ideal figure. He never uses such language for creatures that can fly. Further, we must not forget that, as previously noted, Zhuangzi has, by reference to variations on the ideal figure theme presented Wang Tai as a Perfect Person, Daemonic Person, and a Sage, and he also employs Confucius to call the amputee a Sage outright. Thus, Zhuangzi subtly and yet clearly bestows on Wang Tai the power to fly, but by using language that contains no straightforward depiction of flying itself. Of the five deformed characters depicted in “The Sign of Virtue Complete,” only Wang Tai is explicitly given the power to fly, by which Zhuangzi skillfully re-plays the main theme of the supreme ideal figure, allowing the reader to appreciate the artfulness of his writing.

Other passages in “The Sign of Virtue Complete” also contain words like “wander,” “Sage,” and “Perfect Person,” all of which are meant to remind the reader of the supreme ideal figure. We also encounter the three key phrases—no-self, no-merit, and no-name—again in this chapter. When Zhuangzi talks to Laozi in the person of Shushan No-Toes, he says that Confucius does not possess the substance of a Perfect Person because he still cannot shake off the shackles of merit (Qian 1989: 42) to reach the state of no-self. In the passage about Ai Taituo, Zhuangzi uses Confucius as his spokesman to say that this hideous person “says nothing and yet is trusted, accomplishes nothing and yet is loved” (Qian 1989: 44). This indicates that Ai Taituo already possesses the Sage’s quality of “saying nothing” and a Daemonic Person’s quality of “having no merit.” Zhuangzi also uses Duke Ai of Lu to call Ai Taituo a Perfect Person.<sup>43</sup> In light of all this, even though Zhuangzi does not say anything about Ai Taituo’s ability to fly, he can still be regarded as an example of the supreme ideal figure.

### 4.3 *Definition of the Authentic Person*

At the beginning of this article, I point out that the two terms “Daemonic Person” and “Perfect Person” are not used in “The Great Source as Teacher” at all, but “Sage” appears ten times, as frequently as in “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal.” The term “Authentic Person” is used nine times in this chapter, but never in any other Inner Chapter. This is indeed a very interesting but hard-to-explain phenomenon. LIU Xiaogan ventures a bold speculation on this. He suspects that the three chapters “Free and Easy Wandering,” “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal,” and “The Great Source as Teacher” are representative pieces written when Zhuangzi’s philosophy had reached its maturity

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<sup>43</sup> Duke Ai of Lu said to Minzi, “Now I have heard the words of a Perfect Person” (Qian 1989: 45). At the first glance, this seems like a compliment to Confucius. For instance, CHENG Xuanying interprets this as “Now I have heard the words of Confucius” (Wang and Guo 1962: 216). I instead would like to agree with XUAN Ying, who believes the Perfect Person referred to here is “Aitai Tuo in Confucius’ words,” not Confucius himself (Xuan 1978: 16a).

(Liu 1987: 28). If this speculation is correct, then “Authentic Person” is probably a term that Zhuangzi started to use only much later in his career as a thinker and writer. However, this cannot account for why the Authentic Person does not appear in the other two chapters written at this stage. We shall leave this unanswerable question aside. Instead, I would emphasize here that the cautious reader may have already noticed how many sentences in “The Great Source as Teacher” echo depictions of the supreme ideal figure in the previous five chapters.

XUAN Ying explains that the gist of “The Great Source as Teacher” is to teach people to treat the Way as a model and teacher. He does so citing four sentences from Chapter 25 of the *Dao De Jing* 道德經—namely, “People model themselves on Earth, Earth models itself on Heaven, Heaven models itself on the Way, the Way models itself on *ziran* (self-so)” (Xuan 1978: 30a). The Authentic Person mentioned in the chapter is a supreme ideal figure who has already learned the truth of the Way. What is particularly valuable is that this chapter contains two parables depicting initially ordinary people who succeed at the obviously difficult task of learning to become the supreme ideal figures. I will devote considerable time to a close reading of these parables in the subsequent section.

The chapter can be divided into ten sections. The Authentic Person appears only in the opening section. As a matter of fact, the function of this entire section seems to be providing a definition of the Authentic Person. It starts with the following:

He who knows what Heaven does and what humans do is one who has reached perfection. Knowing what Heaven does, he lives according to Heaven. Knowing what humans do, he uses what he knows to nurture the knowledge of what he does not know and lives out the years that Heaven gives him without being cut off midway. This is the abundance of knowledge. However, there is still a problem. Knowledge must rely on things to become applicable to other things. What it relies on is never certain. How do we know that what we call Heaven is not really human, and what we call human is not really Heaven? Furthermore, there must first be an Authentic Person before there can be authentic knowledge. But what do I mean by an Authentic Person? (Qian 1989: 47; Watson 2013 modified: 42)

Many sentences in this passage and their meanings are direct quotations or modified statements from “The World of Humans.” But the more important connection between this chapter and “The World of Humans” lies in the discussion of perfect knowledge (*zhizhi* 至知) and authentic knowledge (*zhenzhi* 真知). In “The World of Humans,” when Yan Hui asks Confucius for permission to travel to the state of Wei (before Confucius brings up the important notion of the fasting of the heart), he talks about three concepts, namely, the “companion of Heaven,” the “companion of humans,” and the “companion of the ancients,” and states that “Being a companion of Heaven, I know that the Son of Heaven and I are equally sons of Heaven” (Qian 1989: 29).

But immediately after Yan Hui utters his view, Zhuangzi’s spokesman, Confucius, refutes him. It is clear that in this parable, Yan Hui, a mere student of shallow knowledge who knows nothing about “the fasting of the heart,” cannot have already acquired perfect or authentic knowledge. If we see that this passage about Yan Hui as connected with the opening passage of “The Great Source as Teacher,” which discusses Heaven and human knowledge, we can easily follow Zhuangzi’s logic



when he writes, “There must first be an Authentic Person before there can be authentic knowledge. But what do I mean by an Authentic Person?”

From that question to the end of the section, Zhuangzi uses the phrase “the Authentic Person of antiquity” four times to start each of four passages, and the sentence “This is what I call the Authentic Person” to end the last two passages. Here are the first two:

The Authentic Person of antiquity did not reject scarcity, did not become proud in accomplishment, and devised no plans for his affairs. A person like this felt no regret for the mistakes he had made and no self-complacency when he met with success. A person like this could ascend a height without trembling, could enter the water without getting wet, and could enter the fire without feeling any heat. He who has the knowledge to ascend and arrive at the Way is like this.

The Authentic Person of antiquity slept without dreaming and woke without worry. He ate without savoring his food and his breath came from very deep inside. The Authentic Person breathes with his heels, whereas ordinary people breathe with their throats. Those who are defeated gasp out speech as though they were choking. Those with deep desires are shallow in their natural sensitivity. (Qian 1989: 47–48; Watson 2013 modified: 42)

The first few sentences of the first passage above are variations on the earlier statement in “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal”: “I have heard it from Confucius that the sage does not occupy himself with mundane affairs, does not pursue profit or dodge harm, does not enjoy seeking for things or follow the Way.” Here the Authentic Person does not resent having only a small number of things or become self-satisfied with success,<sup>44</sup> nor does he engage in planning ahead. An Authentic Person embraces non-purposive action, cares nothing about gain or loss, claims no credit for accomplishment, and refuses to bother himself with mundane affairs. These are again the qualities of the supreme ideal figure.

The last sentences in this passage are clearly variations on descriptions of the Daemonic Person from “Free and Easy Wandering” and the Perfect Person in “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal.” We have already noted that Zhuangzi has attributed to his supreme ideal the same supernatural powers attributed to shamans. In the current context, he adds the line “A person like this could ascend a height without trembling.”

Previously we discussed how “ascending into the distance” (*dengjia*) in fact describes “ascending way up (into the sky).” In addition to this phrase, Zhuangzi also adds words and phrases, such as “knowledge” and “to the Way,” to make the argument fit better with the discussion on perfect and authentic knowledge. In the light of the added elements, the line can now be interpreted this way: When the Authentic Person’s knowledge reaches the ultimate level, he can fly far off to become one with the Way. If we take into consideration all the previous passages that discuss the extraordinary powers possessed by the Daemonic Person, the Perfect Person, or the Sage, this explanation is right on the mark. Furthermore, in this passage, the phrase “a person like this” can also be found in Wang Ni’s description of the Perfect Person and Yan Hui’s arguments about the companion of Heaven,

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<sup>44</sup>This is WANG Xianqian’s explanation (Wang 1987: 55).



the companion of humans, and the companion of the ancients. The repeated use of this phrase will remind the reader that the Authentic Person is in fact the Perfect Person, but Yan Hui's companion of Heaven is not equivalent to reaching the ultimate level of knowledge. Because of this, the Yan Hui, who has not demonstrated that he truly understands the fasting of the heart, is still not accomplished enough to be called an Authentic Person.

The details about the Authentic Person in the second passage above cannot be found in any descriptions of the Daemonic Person, the Perfect Person, or the Sage in the previous five Inner Chapters. When describing how the Authentic Person breathes, Zhuangzi perhaps uses the theories of ancient Chinese breathing and physical exercises (*daoyin* 導引) as a metaphor.<sup>45</sup> This passage compares the Authentic Person with ordinary people to highlight the former's spiritual depth and superiority. His extremely peaceful heart cannot be disturbed even by dreams. The line "slept without dreaming and woke without worry" can be seen as a striking contrast with sentences from an earlier chapter, "In sleep, men's spirits go visiting; when awake, their bodies hustle. With everything they meet they become entangled. Day after day they use their hearts in strife" (Qian 1989: 9; Watson 2013: 8). Since Zhuangzi's supreme ideal figure has absolute spiritual freedom, it goes without saying that he also has the same peaceful heart as the Authentic Person.

Space does not allow me to quote in full the last two passages, especially since they contain lines that have been determined to be problematic or downright spurious by numerous modern scholars.<sup>46</sup> Still, here are two sections particularly pertinent to the issues under discussion:

The Authentic Person of antiquity knew neither of loving life nor hating death. He emerged without joy and went back in without resistance. He just came and went freely, without any restraint. He did not forget where he had begun and did not seek out where he would end. When he received something, he rejoiced in it, and then he forgot about it and handed it back again. This is what I call not using the heart to harm the Way, not using humans to assist Heaven. This is what I call the Authentic Person. Being like this, he had a heart that was forgetful, a face that was at ease, and a forehead that was broad. He was chilly as autumn and warm as spring. His joy and anger connected with the four seasons. There was appropriateness in his dealing with things, and nobody knew his limit.

.....  
The Authentic Person of antiquity had a lofty bearing that would never crumble. He appeared to lack but did not accept anything. He acted independently but was not obstinate. He appeared boundless but was not ostentatious. Blithe, he seemed to be happy. Hurried, he acted only when [it was] unavoidable. Satiated, he let it show on his face. Contented, his virtue drew us in. All encompassing, he seemed to resemble the world. Overwhelming, he could not be restrained by anything. Reserved, he seemed to prefer to cut himself off. Absentminded, he seemed to forget his words. Hence, his liking was one and his disliking

<sup>45</sup>In Chapter 15 "Constrained in Will" of the *Zhuangzi*, there is a reference to the physical and breathing exercises called *daoyin* 導引. But this chapter is generally considered a work by a follower of Zhuangzi. The passage on *daoyin* can be found in Qian 1989: 122.

<sup>46</sup>For instance, CHEN Guying mentions that Wen Yiduo and Zhang Mosheng have expressed doubts about the authenticity of some passages in this part of "The Great Source as Teacher"; he himself also has doubts about one passage (Chen 1983: 172, 175–76).

was also one. His being one was one and his not being one was also one. In being one, he acted as a companion of Heaven. In not being one, he acted as a companion of humans. Thus, in him, the Heavenly and the human did not prevail over each other. This is what is called the Authentic Person. (Qian 1989: 48–50; Watson 2013 modified: 43–44)

The first passage focuses on the theme of life and death. Here the Authentic Person follows the natural course of things by not “using the heart to harm the Way” or “using humans to assist Heaven.” The phrase “neither loving life nor hating death” can also be found in Changwuzi’s comment on the Sage: “How do I know that loving life is not really a delusion? How do I know that in abhorring death, I am not like a person who left home in youth and has forgotten the way back?” (Qian 1989: 21; Watson 2013 modified: 16). Later when Zhuangzi talks about the death of Laozi and people’s condolences, he says, “The master happened to come because it was his time, and he happened to leave because he followed along (the natural course of things). If one is content with the time and willing to follow along, then neither sorrow nor joy can ever find a way in” (Qian 1989: 26; Watson 2013 modified: 21). The emphasis then is on people’s emotional reaction to life and death. But when this theme is brought up again in its variant form in “The Great Source as Teacher,” Zhuangzi wants to make particularly clear that an Authentic Person with absolute spiritual freedom will not use human intelligence or action to harm the Way or interfere with nature. This attitude of abandoning human effort to follow the natural course of things is another characteristic that all the supreme ideal figures would have. Clearly the passage from “Being like this” to “and nobody knows his limit” describes the Authentic Person’s physical appearance and inner state, because it is placed after the sentence “This is what I call the Authentic Person.”

The first few sentences in the second paragraph quoted above describe the Authentic Person’s behavior and attitude, which “all appear to be so but not so” (Huang 1992: 112). They conform precisely to the paradoxical discourses advocated by Laozi and Zhuangzi. It is worth noting that the line “Hurried, he acted only when [it was] unavoidable” corresponds to a few lines in “The World of Humans” and “The Sign of Virtue Complete,” such as “to understand what one can do nothing about and to be content with it as with destiny” (Qian 1989: 32, 41) and “to ride on things and let your heart roam freely, resign yourself to what cannot be avoided, and nourish what is within you” (Qian 1989: 33). If one can do these things, he has already reached the perfection of virtue. The remarks from “Hence his liking was one” to the end of the passage focus on the Authentic Person’s ability to unify Heaven and humans by not setting them apart in an opposition.

Previously I have mentioned that Yan Hui, who has not attained ultimate knowledge, brings up three notions, the “companion of Heaven,” the “companion of humans,” and the “companion of the ancients,” illustrating that opposition between Heaven and humans still exists. Being able to “unify Heaven and humans,” the Authentic Person naturally presents a sharp contrast to Yan Hui.

Other than in the passage where Zhuangzi seems to refer to ancient Chinese breathing exercise theories and passages that have been deemed problematic by modern scholars, the Authentic Person depicted in the opening section of “The Great Source as Teacher” is not fundamentally different from or superior to the

Perfect Person, the Daemonic Person, or the Sage discussed earlier. The description of the Authentic Person's appearance, behavior, and attitude here supplements the characteristics of ideal figures given in previous chapters.

In the remaining nine sections of "The Great Source as Teacher" (seven of which are cast in parable form), Zhuangzi discusses such important issues as (1) the unavoidable natural process of life and death that Zhuangzi also calls "destiny" (*ming* 命); (2) the formless, everlasting, and boundless Way; (3) the path one must take to learn the Way; (4) the absurdity of ethics and rituals; (5) freedom from the restrictions of the senses and the human heart; and (6) the importance of being at peace with one's lot. These are large and complex issues, so I shall focus on the one parable directly concerned with the subject of this article. However, some of the other issues raised in these sections will still come into play over the course of my analysis.

#### 4.4 *Birds of a Feather Fly Together*

In the story of Zi Sanghu 子桑戶 and his friends in the sixth section, Zhuangzi again plays the theme of flying without wings, but, as usual, with significant embellishments and alterations. This section starts with the following:

The three friends, Zi Sanghu, Meng Zifan, and Zi Qinzhang, talked to one another, "Who can join with others in not joining with others, and act with others in not acting with others? Who can ascend into the sky to wander in the mists, fiddle and stir in the infinite, and live a life forgetful of one another forever and ever?" The three men looked at one another and smiled. No disagreement existed in their hearts and so they continued to be friends. (Qian 1989: 56; Watson 2013 modified: 49)

According to WANG Shumin, who quotes LU Deming's annotation in the *Jingdian shiwen* and XU Shen's 許慎 (ca. 58–ca. 147) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (An Explication of Written Characters), the word *tiao* 挑 (to fiddle) means the same as *nao* 撓 (to stir) and *nao* means the same as *dong* 動 (to move). Hence, to "fiddle and stir" means to move about in the infinite (Wang 1988: 251). Isn't this virtually the same as saying that Zi Sanghu and his friends can ascend into the sky and wander boundlessly? The answer to the question is undeniably: yes we can. It cannot be more obvious than that this is another variation on the theme of flying. Interestingly, this time it is raised as a series of self-evident questions posed by three men who instantiate the supreme ideal figure. This is the very first time in the Inner Chapters that this theme is presented in the mouths of such figures. Furthermore, Zhuangzi adds the idea of "living a life forgetful of one another forever and ever" to press home the point. The phrase "forgetful of one another" (*xiang wang* 相忘) appears in an earlier passage in "The Great Source as Teacher" and will recur a bit later in the very same section. I will discuss the importance of this reiteration when we come to the phrase again.

## 4.5 Zhuangzi's *View of Life and Death*

The short opening of this section introduces larger and more complex issues relevant to the life of Zhuangzi's supreme ideal figure. The remainder of the parable runs as follows:

After a quiet period, Zi Sanghu died. Before he was buried, Confucius heard about this and sent Zigong to help at the funeral. [When Zigong arrived, he found] one of the friends composing a song and the other strumming a zither. The two sang in unison:

Alas, Sanghu! Alas, Sanghu!

You've returned to the authentic

While we remain as humans!

Zigong hurried forward and said, "Dare I ask if it is in accordance with the rites to sing beside the corpse?"

The two men looked at each other and laughed, saying, "What does this man know about the meaning of the rites?"

Zigong returned and reported to Confucius, asking, "What sort of people are they? They have no culture in their conduct and consider their bodies external to themselves. They sing beside the corpse, without a change of countenance. I cannot think of any name for them. What sort of people are they?"

Confucius said, "They are people who wander outside the realm of the square. I, Qiu, am one of those who wander within the realm of the square. The outside and the within can never meet. I was a fool to have sent you there to mourn. They are about to join the Thing Maker as companions, to wander in the single breath of Heaven and Earth. They regard life as an appendage attached to them, a protruding excrescence. They regard death as the bursting of a boil and the dispersion of a carbuncle. Such being the case, how could they know the distinction between life and death as well as what comes first and what last? They just lodge within a body composed of elements borrowed from different things. They forget their liver and gall, cast aside their ears and eyes, letting life end and begin, without the slightest inkling of the difference between them. Boundless, they roam beyond the world of dust and dirt, freely playing in the business of non-purposive action. How could they bother themselves with the trivial rites of the vulgar world, to make a display for the ears and eyes of ordinary people?"

Zigong said, "Well then, master, what is the square that you adhere to?"

Confucius said, "I, Qiu, am one of those people punished by Heaven. Nevertheless, I will share with you what I know."

Zigong said, "May I ask about the way to accomplish this?"

Confucius said, "Fish thrive together in water and humans thrive together in the Way. For those that thrive in water, dig a pond, and they will find sufficient nourishment. For those that thrive in the Way, leave them to do nothing, and their life will be in peace. Thus it is said, 'Fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and humans forget one another in the arts of the Way.'"

Zigong said, "May I ask about the extraordinary person?"

Confucius replied, "The extraordinary person is extraordinary in comparison with other people but is an equal of Heaven. Therefore, it is said, 'The petty person of Heaven is the superior person among people; the superior person among people is the petty person of Heaven.'" (Qian 1989: 56–57; Watson 2013 modified: 49–50)

On one level, we could say that here Zhuangzi is deconstructing what he just said. We must not forget, however, that in the first section of the chapter he has already pointed to the disparity between the Authentic Person and ordinary humans. The parable here continues to highlight that disparity by first focusing on the divergent

views of life and death. Zhuangzi uses Zi Sanghu's death and the mourning rites to bring out the sharp contrast between the two views. Pre-modern Chinese culture placed great emphasis on mourning rituals.<sup>47</sup> These rites include norms of behavior such as wearing proper attire, standing in the right spot, facing the right direction, wailing, baring a portion of the torso, foot-stomping, etc., used by mourners to express grief and respect for the dead. Zhuangzi is critical of these elaborate codes of behavior because they are unnatural social norms that go against his naturalistic view of life and death.

In the Inner Chapters, altogether four episodes deal with mourning situations. The first appears in "The Principle of Nurturing Life," in which Qin Yi 秦失 is described as mourning his dead friend Lao Dan (i.e., Laozi) by giving three cries (apparently parodying the ancient Chinese custom of performing three rounds of foot-stomping) and nothing else.<sup>48</sup> The other three incidents appear one after another in "The Great Source as Teacher." The second episode is about four kindred spirits, Master Si, Master Yu, Master Li, and Master Lai, who "regard nothingness as the head, life as the spine, and death as the rump," and "know that life and death, existence and destruction, are all one body" (Qian 1989: 54–56; Watson 2013 modified: 47).

Master Yu and Master Lai fall ill and, on the brink of death, instead of showing fear, they welcome the opportunity to have parts of their bodies transformed by Nature into other things. Master Yu is the first to get sick, and when Master Si comes to visit, Yu tells him, "Remarkable! The Thing Maker is making me all contorted like this!" The narrator in the parable then depicts his appearance:

Hunched over with his backbone sticking up, the accupoints for his five organs appear on the top, his chin buried down in his navel, his shoulders higher than the crown of his head, and his hair bun pointing at the sky. The yin and yang breaths within him must be in disorder, and yet he appears calm at heart and undisturbed. (Qian 1989: 54; Watson 2013 modified: 47)

This portrayal is clearly a slightly altered version of Deformed Shu who we met earlier. But while Deformed Shu seems to have been born like that, Master Yu's contortion is the result of his sickness. Master Yu tells his visiting friend,

Moreover, I received life when the time came, and I will lose it when the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and abide in this order, and neither sorrow nor joy can ever find a way in. In the old days, this was called the "freeing of the bond." (Qian 1989: 56; Watson 2013 modified: 48)

This language has already appeared in a somewhat different form in Qin Yi's comment about Lao Dan's birth and death. Regarding the role that breath (*qi* 氣 in Chinese, breath, vapor, vital energy, or spirit in English) plays in the process of life

<sup>47</sup>I have touched upon this topic in my article (Lin 2009: 53–56). There are chapters on mourning in such ancient texts as the *Liji* 禮記 (Records of Rites) and the *Yili* 儀禮 (Etiquette and Rites): See 問喪, 喪服小記, 喪大記, and 奔喪 in the *Liji* and 喪服 and 士喪禮 in the *Yili*.

<sup>48</sup>I have discussed in detail this episode in my article "Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose: The Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*" in the book (Cai 2022: 108–110).

and death, the following passage from Chapter 22 “Knowledge Wandered North” (“Zhi bei you” 知北遊) perhaps offers the best explanation: “Life is the companion of death; death is the beginning of life. Who understands their workings? Human life is a coming-together of breath. If it comes together there is life; if it scatters, there is death” (Qian 1989: 173; Watson 2013 modified: 177). Thus, the time when a person receives or loses life is the time that the breath, consisting of both yin and yang elements, comes together or scatters. The comment “the yin and yang breaths within him must be in disorder” perhaps indicates that Master Yu is on the brink of death. Zhuangzi’s attitude, then, is that life and death are nothing but the inevitable natural process of coming-together and dispersal of the breath, so one must simply accept what comes without making a fuss.

The second section of “The Great Source as Teacher” begins with “Death and life are destined—natural as the regular alternation of night and day.”<sup>49</sup> The Chinese word rendered “destined” here is *ming* 命, which is sometimes taken by scholars to equate to the concept of fate in English. It is important to point out, however, that unlike fate, *ming* does not carry any connotation of predestination. Nonetheless, destiny is still a kind of bond, and death brings a person release from it.

After the account of Master Yu, the parable turns to Master Lai, saying, “All of a sudden Master Lai fell ill, panting and puffing (as if) he was about to die. His wife and children gathered around him and began to cry” (Qian 1989: 55; Watson 2013 modified: 48). In his commentary on these lines, CHENG Xuanying says that since Master Lai appears about to die, his close relatives are ready to perform the custom of placing fresh silk fibers near his nostrils (until he has stopped breathing), and so, his family gathers around (Wang and Guo 1962: 262). If CHENG Xuanying is correct, Master Lai’s wife and children are performing the beginning of the mourning ritual.<sup>50</sup> At that moment, Master Li arrives to find out about his friend, and he scolds them, telling them to stay away from the Thing Maker’s process of transforming Lai into other things. Master Lai then tells the visitor that he regards nature as his parents who must be obeyed. He continues,

The Great Clod (i.e., Earth but here it stands for Nature, the Thing Maker, or Maker and Transformer) burdens me with a physical form, toils me with life, eases me with old age, and rests me in death. Therefore, if I think well of my life, for the same reason I must also think well of my death. (Qian 1989: 262, 242; Watson 2013 modified: 48, 44)<sup>51</sup>

The first sentence concisely summarizes Zhuangzi’s view of the entire journey of human life, and the second expresses his attitude running counter to that of ordinary people who “love life and hate death,” already described in connection with the

<sup>49</sup> I borrow the line “Death and life are destined” from A. C. Graham because I think he has preserved better the sense and the order of the words of the original Chinese text (Graham 1986: 86).

<sup>50</sup> In the *Liji* (禮記·喪大記) there is a description of the practice of *zhu kuang* 屬纊, placing fresh silk fibers near a dying person’s nostrils and waiting until he or she stops breathing.

<sup>51</sup> These two sentences appear verbatim in section two of the chapter in the modern received text. CHEN Guying mentions that both WANG Maohong 王懋竑 (1668–1741) and MA Xulun 馬敘倫 (1885–1970) thought that their occurrence in section two is an incidence of textual corruption (Chen 1983: 179).

Authentic Person of antiquity. Master Lai goes on to compare Heaven and Earth (i.e., cosmos, nature) to a great furnace and the Maker and Transformer (*zao hua* 造化, another name for nature, cosmos) to a great smith, and declares that he accepts wherever nature lets him go. The section ends with a brief note on Master Lai's falling into a sound sleep and contentedly waking up again. In the end, none of the four friends dies, and the assembly of the wife and children of the gravely ill Master Lai proves to be a complete waste of time, in addition to being utterly meaningless in Zhuangzi's opinion. This second section, then, provides an illustration of the idea "Be content with this time and abide in this order, and neither sorrow nor joy can ever find a way in." The four friends, being able to keep such ordinary human emotions as sorrow and joy out of their hearts, become Authentic Persons who "do not use the heart to harm the Way, nor use what is human to assist Heaven."

#### 4.6 *To Be Boxed In, or Not to Be Boxed In, That Is the Question*

Now let us return to the story about Zi Sanghu and his friends. Appalled by the two survivors' behavior, Zi Gong rushes forward to ask them if singing beside a corpse is in accordance with the social norms stipulated in the rites. Amused by his disapproving inquiry, Meng Zifan and Zi Qinzhang laugh and respond with a dismissive "What does this man know about the meaning of the rites?" Zi Gong then goes back to report to Confucius, saying that he does not know what to make of these people whose behavior runs so counter to established norms. In reply, Confucius claims that he himself only wanders in "the realm within the square," meaning that he acts only within the enclosed realm of human society. But Zi Sanghu and his friends wander beyond those limits, that is, they are part of a realm that is "one and the same" with Heaven and Earth. "To have joined the Thing Maker" means "to have become Nature's companion" (Chen 1983: 179), which is the same as the "companion of Heaven." There is no question then that Zi Sanghu and his friends are fictional characters Zhuangzi creates to exemplify the supreme ideal figure.

Again using Confucius as his mask, Zhuangzi alludes to the passage in the fourth section of Book II of *The Analects of Confucius*, specifically, "At seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line" (Lau 1979: 63). The original Chinese word *ju* 矩, rendered "the line" by D. C. Lau here, literally refers to a carpenter's square. Through decades of internalizing ethical codes and social norms until they become second nature to him, Confucius finally accomplished the level of freedom of behavior without ever transgressing norms and boundaries. As Zhuangzi's puts it, Confucius is able to "wander freely within the square." By contrast, the free and easy wandering of Zi Sanghu and his two friends takes place outside this square. Thus, the rites upheld by Confucius and his disciples do not apply to them. In fact, "singing beside the corpse" is an entirely appropriate ritual for them to perform in sending off their friend. The lines "You've returned to the



Authentic / While we remain as humans!” in their song are informative. “The authentic” refers to the genuine state of nature in which all things co-exist harmoniously and blend into one breath. If one understands, or accepts, this line of reasoning, one will not be sad over a friend’s departure. In actual fact, Zhuangzi believes that one does not need to be sad even over the departure of a parent. This is expressed in the third parable in “The Great Source as Teacher,” which involves Yan Hui talking with Confucius after having observed a certain Mengsun Cai’s bizarre behavior: “When Mengsun Cai’s mother died, he cried without shedding tears, had no sorrow in his heart, and during the period of mourning, he did not grieve. Despite his failure on all three counts, he was known throughout the state of Lu for being the best at mourning” (Qian 1989: 274; Watson 2013 modified: 51). Zhuangzi again has his mouthpiece Confucius affirm that Mengsun Cai has exhausted all there is to do in funeral rites.

In the Zi Sanghu story, how does Zhuangzi’s Confucius respond to Zi Gong’s comment that the two people consider the body as external to themselves? Apart from the fact that his response is cast in the language of shock, it complies with Zhuangzi’s views on life and death. In interpreting what Confucius—the character in the parable—says about the view of life and death here, Guo Xiang says,

[For them, life] is an excrescence that protrudes by itself, an appendage that attaches by itself. This is breath coming together for the time being, and thus is not something for them to delight in.

[For them, death] is a boil that bursts by itself, a carbuncle that disperses by itself. This is breath scattering on its own, and thus is not something for them to feel sorry about. (Wang and Guo 1962: 269)<sup>52</sup>

It is clear that when Guo Xiang wrote the above, he had in mind the passage quoted above from “Knowledge Wandered North.” Precisely because the body is external to themselves, Meng Zifan and Zi Qinzhang are happy to simply let nature transform them into other things after they die. Prior to “The Great Source as Teacher,” Zhuangzi has expressed this attitude in slightly different words. In Wang Ni’s remark about the Perfect Person, we have seen the line “Even life and death cannot affect him, much less the sprouts of gains and loss!” Again, in the Wang Tai story the line “Life and death are great matters, but they can bring him no change.” Both of the passages from which the remarks are quoted contain depictions of flying. As we already know, the prerequisite for the supreme ideal figure’s ability to fly is his absolute spiritual freedom, which is not conditioned by anything whatsoever, not even by human concern with such normally great matters as life and death.

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<sup>52</sup>Given that “Knowledge Wandered North” in the Outer Chapters is generally regarded as the work of a follower of Zhuangzi, the passage that explains life and death as a process of breath coming together or scattering, could in turn be based on this remark of Confucius in “The Great Source as Teacher.”

## 4.7 *Of Fish, Humans, and the Way*

In the words of Confucius at the end of the third parable (about Mengsun Cai's mourning his mother's death), "Be content with what has been arranged (by nature) and go along with (its) transformations, one will then be able to enter the realm of the empty, the natural, and the unified whole" (Qian 1989: 58). The empty, the natural, and the unified whole refers to Dao, the Way (Wang 1988: 264). This takes us back to the ending of the Zi Sanghu story in which Confucius says, "Fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and humans forget one another in the arts of the Way." One is reminded that Zi Sanghu and his two friends "live a life forgetful of one another." To get a clear sense of what Zhuangzi means by a mode of life characterized by forgetfulness and "wandering in the realm of the Way," we find the most complete clues in "The Great Source as Teacher." Let us deal with "the Way" first.

The word *dao* (the Way) appears in the Inner Chapters a total of forty-six times. With only a handful of exceptions where the word is used in the ordinary sense of "way" or "course" (such as in the compound term *zhongdao*, meaning midway), Dao is a loaded term in Zhuangzi's philosophy. While it is usually not described in an elaborate manner, in the third section of this chapter we find the following rather detailed account of it:

The Way has its genuine identity and evidence but is without purposive action or form. It can be transmitted but not received, obtained but not seen. It is its own source and root. Before heaven and earth existed, it was there, firm from ancient times. It has made spirits and the Lord Daemonic,<sup>53</sup> and has given birth to heaven and earth. It is above the highest point but cannot be considered high. It is below the six directions (i.e., the whole world), but cannot be considered deep. It was born before heaven and earth but cannot be considered long-lasting. It is of greater age than remote antiquity but cannot be considered old. (Qian 1989: 51; Watson 2013 modified: 45)

The opening two lines in this passage are reminiscent of the description of the True Lord (*zhenzai* 真宰 or *zhenjun* 真君) in "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal":

It would seem as though there is some True Lord, but I cannot find any trace of him. He can act—that is certain, but I cannot see his form. He has genuine identity but no form. Whether or not I succeed in finding his identity, it neither adds to nor distracts from his genuineness. (Qian 1989: 11–12; Watson 2013 modified: 8–9)

The term "True Lord" has been interpreted by scholars of the *Zhuangzi* in various ways. Some commentators take it as the personification of the Way, while others as that of the original heart (*benxin* 本心), the true heart (*zhenxin* 真心), or the Thing

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<sup>53</sup>"It has made spirits and the Lord Daemonic" is my rendering of 神鬼神帝. Literally, *gui* 鬼 refers to the spirits of dead humans, but in broader usage, it can be used to refer to demons, devils, and the spirits of other beings. I use "Lord" to translate *di* 帝 referring not to the Christian God but to the Deified Ancestor, the Supreme Ruler of the cosmos in the remote ancient times. In philosophical texts, the word *di* has been replaced by, or used to refer to, *tian* 天 (Heaven or Nature).

Maker.<sup>54</sup> We can argue that there is one other possible reference for the True Lord: the Daemon in a person. In the parable about the cook in “The Principle of Nurturing Life,” there is this remark (already mentioned previously) the cook makes about butchering an ox: “And now—now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception [by the senses] and understanding [by the heart] have come to a stop, and spirit moves where it wants.” In this passage, “spirit” is the English word I use to translate *shen* 神 or Daemon. The Daemon the cook talks about is capable of moving freely because it is completely unaffected by human senses and intellect. Hence, it is natural, spontaneous, and authentic. In my view, even though the term “True Lord” appears in a context where Zhuangzi is discussing the human person, its reference should not be restricted to any of the things mentioned above (namely, the original heart, the true heart, the Daemon, nature, or the Way). Rather, the True Lord refers to the Way that is immanent in a person, manifesting as his original, true, and authentic heart, or his Daemon. An Authentic Person’s heart is thoroughly in sync with the Way.

The passage above describing the Way is followed by a long list of objects in nature (the constellations, the sun and the moon) and legendary as well as historical figures (Fu Xi, the Yellow Emperor, Peng Zu, Queen Mother of the West, and Fu Yue) who have obtained the Way. I shall mention only one particular item in the list: “The Yellow Emperor obtained it and ascended into the clouds and sky” (Qian 1989: 52). Zhuangzi does not fail to tell us that obtaining the Way is essential to free and easy wandering. At the beginning of the passage, he also clearly states that the Way “can be transmitted but not received.” In the Inner Chapters, Zhuangzi provides a total of three parables instantiating this statement and we will turn to these next.

#### 4.8 *Teaching a Person to Become a Sage*

Let’s first take up the fourth section of “The Great Source as Teacher,” the section immediately following the one describing the Dao, which presents a story detailing the process of becoming a Sage. It is in fact the second instantiation of the transmission of the Way in the Inner Chapters.

Nanbo Zikui asked Woman Crookback, “You are advanced in age, and yet your complexion is like that of a child. Why is this?”

“I have heard the Way.”

“Can the Way be learned?” asked Nanbo Zikui.

“Oh, no, not a chance! You aren’t the person to do it, anyway. There’s Buliang Yi who has the talent of a sage but not the Way of a sage, and I have the Way of a sage but not the talent of a sage. I wanted to teach him to see if I could really make him into a sage. If I couldn’t, it’s still easier to explain the Way of a sage to someone who has the talent of a sage. So I began explaining and kept at it, and after three days, he was able to put the world

<sup>54</sup> For instance, as “the Way,” see Wang and Guo 1962: 56; Qian 1989: 11, and Wang 1988: 53; as “original heart,” see Zhang 1972: 138; as “true heart,” see Chen 1983: 47; and as “Thing Maker,” see Lin 1997: 19.

outside himself. After he was able to put the world outside himself, I kept at it, and after seven days, he was able to put things outside himself. After he had put things outside himself, I kept at it and after nine days, he was able to put life outside himself. After he had put life outside himself, he was able to attain the brightness of dawn. After the brightness of dawn, he was able to see singularity. After having seen singularity, he was able to do away with past and present, and after he had done away with past and present, he was able to enter where there is neither life nor death. That which kills life doesn't die, and that which gives life doesn't live. As a thing, there's nothing it doesn't send off, nothing it doesn't welcome, nothing it doesn't destroy, and nothing it doesn't bring to completion. Its name is Peace-in-Disturbance. It is so named because it brings things to peaceful completion after disturbance. (Qian 1989: 52–53; Watson 2013 modified: 46–47)

There is no question that the striking image of an old hunchback woman with the complexion of a child is a variation on the theme of the Daemonic Person on Guyi Mountain introduced in “Free and Easy Wandering”: “His skin is like ice and snow, and he is lovely and chaste like a virgin.” In this particular variation, Zhuangzi makes a few significant changes to this depiction of the ideal figure: the first is a clear indication of advanced age; the second is altering the person's gender from a man to a woman; and the third is endowing the person with a physical deformity to echo the gnarled trees and deformed humans that have achieved uselessness. Above all, Woman Crookback is someone in possession of the Way of a Sage. At the core of the parable is her successfully teaching a talented student to become a Sage. Zhuangzi does not tell us what Woman Crookback actually taught. This omission is important because Buliang Yi could not just receive the way his teacher has achieved in her person as if it is an object out there to be handed over from one person to another. There are seven discernible stages in Buliang Yi's obtaining the Way: (1) turning away from the world to start an inward journey, (2) casting away all sensorial attachments so that things are left outside himself, (3) letting go of the value of life, (4) achieving clarity and enlightenment, (5) seeing the oneness and unity of the Way, (6) transcending past and present (i.e., the artificial divisions of time), and (7) entering the realm that transcends life and death.

Prior to this parable, Zhuangzi has written about the inward journey as the “fasting of the heart” in “The World of Humans.” In the final portion of Yan Hui's conversation there with his teacher about how to serve the imperious young ruler of Wei, after Confucius has scoffed at his remark about being a companion of Heaven, humans, and the ancients, Yan Hui admits:

“I have nothing else with which to go further. May I ask for direction?” “Fast, and then I will tell you,” Confucius replied. “Do you think it's easy to act while you have something? If you think it is easy to act this way, it will not comply with bright Heaven (i.e., Nature).”

Yan Hui said, “Hui's family is poor. I haven't drunk any wine or eaten any meat for several months. So can that count as fasting?”

“That is the fasting before a sacrifice, not the fasting of the heart.”

“May I ask, what is the fasting of the heart?”

Confucius said, “Unify your will. Don't listen with the ears but with the heart. Don't listen with the heart but with the breath (*qi*). The ears are limited to listening, and the heart is limited to tallying (perceptions, emotions, and thoughts with things outside). The breath denotes that which is empty and awaits things (to appear). The Way abides in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the heart.”

Yan Hui said, “Before I heard what you have said, everything I have done certainly has come from Hui. After I hear what you have said, there really has never been Hui. Can this be called emptiness?”

Confucius said, “That is all there is to it! ... You have heard of those who fly with wings, but you have never heard of those who fly without wings. You have heard of those who know with knowledge, but you have never heard of those who know without knowledge. Look at that void, an empty room where brightness is born, where auspiciousness comes to rest. If you cannot stay at rest, you will be galloping while sitting down. If you keep your ears and eyes open to what is within, leaving your heart and knowledge on the outside,<sup>55</sup> even spirits and the Daemon will come to dwell, not to speak of humans! (Qian 1989: 30–31; Watson 2013 modified: 25–26)

The Chinese sentence for “Do you think it’s easy to act while you have something already?” in my translation above is 有而為，其易邪? On the basis of the Zhang Junfang 張君房 (fl. 1001) edition, which is no longer extant, CHEN Jingyuan 陳景元 (?–1094) of the Northern Song renders it: “‘Do you think it’s easy to act while you have a heart?’ [有心而為之，其易邪?] See Zhang (Junfang’s) edition. [The character “*xin*” (heart)] is missing in the old texts.”<sup>56</sup> Guo Xiang’s commentary on the line runs as follows: “To act while one has his heart is truly not easy” (夫有其心而為者，誠未易也) (Wang and Guo 1962: 146). The existence of CHEN Jingyuan’s notes and GUO Xiang’s reading has emboldened a number of modern scholars to believe that the edition GUO Xiang saw must have *xin* 心 after *you* 有 (to have). Several modern scholars have even gone so far as to emend the original sentence to read “有心而為之，其易邪?” in their published texts of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>57</sup> In a recent study, JIANG Menma 蔣門馬 has exhaustively examined all available Northern Song editions of the *Zhuangzi* to arrive at the persuasive conclusion that 有而為，其易邪? is the version of the sentence found in the available earliest editions of the text, and that GUO Xiang merely inserted “*xin*” in his interpretation of the passage rather than relying on a text that had the character in it (Jiang 2013b:

<sup>55</sup> I follow GUO Xiang 郭象 and Li Yi 李頤 (of the Jin dynasty, exact dates unknown) in reading *xun* 徇 in the line “夫徇耳目內通” as *shi* 使 (literally, cause, make, or keep). For GUO Xiang and Li Yi’s reading, see WANG Xiaoyu and GUO Qingfan 1962: 151.

<sup>56</sup> CHEN Jingyuan 陳景元 (with the courtesy name Bixu 碧虛) compiled a list of “omissions and errors” in the *Zhuangzi* text in one *juan* under the title of *Zhuangzi que wu* 莊子闕誤, which is preserved in its entirety in the appendix to Jiao Hong’s *Zhuangzi yi* 莊子翼, *juan* 8: 32–40. For *Zhuangzi yi*, I use the edition in the collection of The University of Washington, a 1588 edition digitized by The National Central Library of Taiwan [China: Publisher not identified]. CHEN Jingyuan’s remark under discussion can be found in *juan* 8: 32–33.

<sup>57</sup> To my knowledge, LIU Wendian 劉文典 (1889–1958) was the first scholar to emend the sentence in this way. (Liu 1980: 129) After him, in his collation and proofreading of GUO Qingfan’s *Zhuangzi ji shi*, WANG Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (1900–1981) notes that according to CHEN Bixu’s note and GUO Xiang’s commentary, he has added the missing character to the sentence. To my knowledge, Wang Xiaoyu is the very first person in history to have added *xin* to the sentence. (Wang and Guo 1962: Vol. 1, 146) This book was first printed possibly in 1895, because WANG Xianqian 王先謙 dated his preface to it in the 12th month of the year Jiawu 甲午 in the Guangxu 光緒 Reign (1875–1908) which would correspond to early 1895 in the Western calendar (Wang and Guo 1962: Vol. 1, 2).

69–74, 117).<sup>58</sup> In my own attempt to do a close reading of the “fasting of the heart” parable, I have been drawn to the commentaries of CHEN Xiangdao 陳祥道 (1053–1093) and WANG Fuzhi, who both appear to be looking at texts with the version of “Do you think it’s easy to act while you have something already?” in them. Neither scholar has made use of GUO Xiang’s comment in their own understanding of the sentence. Although CHEN Xiangdao wrote a *Commentary on the Zhuangzi*, his text is not extant today. Fortunately, significant passages from his commentary, including one on the parable we have been discussing, are preserved in Chu Boxiu’s *Nanhua zhenjing yihai zuanwei* 南華真經義海纂微. He begins his comment on the “fasting of the heart” as follows:

To act while one has something already was considered problematic by the ancients. If one has thoughts, one must fast, and if one engages in any purposive action, one must give it up. Thus, those wishing to make their virtues Daemonic and luminous, they must fast their hearts. This is the reason why Confucius admonishes Yan Hui. (Chu 1999: 8.5b–6a)

Here CHEN Xiangdao does not tell us who the ancients were. Perhaps it is just one ancient, specifically Laozi, that he is referring to, since the concept of *wuwei* 無為 or non-purposive action, traditionally regarded as invented by this revered thinker of antiquity, is used a number of times in his extant comments on the *Zhuangzi*. In one such comment on passages prior to the conversation about the fasting of the heart, CHEN Xiangdao remarks:

Regarding the world, the Perfect Person has never had any thought. ... [he] has never had any purposive action. He simply responds when stimulated and makes motions when compelled. How could he be wearing himself down over the mundane affairs of the world? Master Yan (i.e., Yan Hui) knows [how] to manage the world with thoughts and purposive actions but not [how] to just respond to things without thought or purpose. He wishes to save the Prince of Wei from his error of being imperious and to save the people from ignorance. This is why Confucius scoffs at his being disorganized and disruptive. (Chu 2018: 7.8a)

By highlighting the problem of purposive action that Zhuangzi inherits from Laozi, CHEN Xiangdao’s comments above can be tied to the fasting of the heart parable and elsewhere in the Inner Chapters. The Perfect Person appears in the first long response Confucius gives to Yan Hui: “The Perfect Person of old nurtured in others only what he had first nurtured in himself” (Qian 1989: 27). In Chen’s understanding, what needs to be nurtured first in Yan Hui is the ability to merely respond to things without any forethought or urge to take purposive action.

Obviously at this point, Confucius does not think that his student has attained this level of being. Returning to the sentence “To act while one has something already,” we can say that CHEN Xiangdao means to say, “To take a purposive action while one has some thought for doing so already.” This is obviously contrary to how the Perfect Person acts, and thus Yan Hui must do the fasting of the heart first.

<sup>58</sup> Regarding the argument that the sentence should read 有而為, 其易邪? rather than 有心而為之, 其易邪? as in most received texts we now have, please see the exhaustive discussion in JIANG Menma’s 蔣門馬 article (Jiang 2013a: 120), also his book, vol.2 (Jiang 2019: 49).

GUO Xiang's remark offers a viable interpretation of the sentence too. Where does one find "thought and purpose" in a person? In the heart, of course. In ancient Chinese philosophical texts, although the word *xin* (heart) sometimes refers to the physical organ, it usually denotes a person's faculty that thinks, feels, and makes judgments, decisions, and plans. The heart is the central part of a person that includes both intellectual and emotional elements.

This is distinct from the usual Western division of the functions of the mind and the heart. In the "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal" chapter, we find the concept of the "heart that is already formed" (*chengxin* 成心) in the remark: "If a person follows his heart that is already formed and makes it his teacher, then who is without a teacher? Why should it be only the person who knows change and whose heart makes its own judgments who has a teacher?" (Qian 1989: 11; Watson 2013: 9). To Zhuangzi, the "already formed heart" of the ordinary adult human is full of artificial ideas, biases, and values that can impose contrived limits on a person's action or life in general. A good Daoist is expected to engage in natural, free, spontaneous, and non-purposive action, so that his heart can always remain in its pristine state of naturalness, harmony, transparency, and emptiness. The heart in GUO Xiang's comment undoubtedly refers to this "already formed heart," which Guo derives from the local context of the fasting of the heart parable.

Right before Yan Hui confesses that he has "nothing else with which to go further," Confucius remarks that his student is "someone who still takes the heart as his teacher."<sup>59</sup> Given the pejorative force of the comment, Confucius can only mean the "already formed human heart" here. The remark "someone who still takes the heart as his teacher" is an instantiation in altered form of the "heart that is already formed" first mentioned in the "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal" chapter. Similarly, Confucius' advice to not "listen with the heart but with the breath" again refers to the "heart that is already formed."

The most brilliant reading of the line "Do you think it's easy to act while you have something already?" is given in my view by WANG Fuzhi. He says,

"To have something with which to" means "to regard 'that by which to' as 'something people have.'" "Upright and empty-hearted," "diligent and single-hearted," "inwardly direct and outwardly pliable," and "modeling upon the ancients" are all that make up "that by which to" and are seized upon by people as "things they have." In responding to things, when people have something, they ordinarily find it easy to act, and when they have nothing, they ordinarily find it difficult to act. (Wang 1984: 38)

Here, just like GUO Xiang and CHEN Xiangdao before him, WANG Fuzhi also directly quotes from the *Zhuangzi* to set forth his own interpretation. He pinpoints the contrast between "to have something with which to" (*youyi* 有以) and "to have nothing with which to" (*wuyi* 無以), the former phrase that appears in Confucius' inquiry of his student ("Nevertheless, you must have something with which to [go about your business]. Try to tell me what it is."), and the latter in what Yan Hui says after his reply is disproved point by point by his teacher ("I have nothing else with which to go further. May I ask for direction?"). The four items from "upright and

<sup>59</sup> See 猶師心者也 (Wang and Guo 1962: 145).



empty-hearted” to “modeling upon the ancients” all constitute ways “that by which to,” that is, they are “things” Yan Hui thinks he possesses. Like every ordinary adult human, Yan Hui mentions that he has these things so he is ready to serve the prince of Wei. As WANG Fuzhi points out, “‘that by which to’ (*yi* 以) is generated by a person’s ‘knowledge and perceptions of the heart’ (*xin zhi* 心知) and is not what his heart (originally) has” (Wang 1984: 37). In other words, it is something that comes from the “already formed heart.” Furthermore, if one makes an effort to be “upright” or “diligent,” his heart is no longer empty or unified because “the heart is originally without knowledge, and so, a baby is without knowledge, but not without a heart” (Wang 1984: 37, 38). WANG Fuzhi explains that all this is “nothing but people taking ‘that by which to’ to form in their hearts and manifest (the features of ‘upright,’ etc.) in their countenance” (Wang 1984: 37). In this story, Zhuangzi has Yan Hui admit that “inwardly direct and outwardly pliable” is something everybody does and “modeling upon the ancients” is what the ancients had already practiced. Like the first two items, then, these two are also acquired traits and thus do not belong to the original heart at all. “Thoughts and purposes” and “something with which to” are things the ordinary adult humans acquire into their free and empty original hearts. They constitute what GUO Xiang refers to as the “heart” in his commentary. This “heart” should be called the “already formed heart” and it is this that needs to be gotten rid of in the process of the fasting of the heart.

Although not explicitly noted by the author, the fasting of the heart parable seems to be based on the same meditative situation described in the parable that opens “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal,” in which the sagely Ziqi of South Wall “sat leaning on his armrest, staring up at the sky and breathing—in a trance as though he’d lost his partner.”<sup>60</sup> Perhaps Confucius’ remark in the current story, “If you cannot stay at rest, you will be galloping while sitting down,” can be read as implying the sense of sitting in meditation. At the same time Confucius reminds Yan Hui that he has not heard of those who fly without wings and those who know without knowledge. This clearly indicates that Yan Hui has not yet put the fasting of the heart into practice. In a moment, I shall take up the section in “The Great Source as Teacher” that depicts the way Yan Hui accomplishes “sitting and forgetting,” thereby attaining the ideal of the Authentic Person. Let’s first consider the issue of “hearing the Way” that begins Confucius’ explanation.

At the core of the Ziqi story is the experience of hearing three kinds of music: the piping of humans, the piping of earth, and the piping of Heaven. As I noted above, the piping of Heaven is a metaphor for the Way, and hearing it is hearing (i.e., knowing) the Way.<sup>61</sup> Ziqi has heard the Way because he has made his body like a withered

<sup>60</sup>A close reading of this entire parable can be found in my book chapter “Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose: The Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*” in (Cai 2022). The remark “he’d lost his partner” is generally taken to mean “he’d lost the opposition between his self and the world” or “he’d lost the opposition between his body and his spirit.”

<sup>61</sup>Regarding the three modes of piping, the following comment from Burton Watson is right on the money: “Heaven is not something distinct from earth and [hu]man[s], but a name applied to the natural and spontaneous functioning of the two” (Watson 2013: 8).

tree and his heart like dead ashes, that is, he has lost his limited human self. To explain the fasting of the heart, Confucius tells Yan Hui that he needs to go beyond listening with the ears and the heart to arrive at listening with the breath (*qi*). In the conversation between Ziqi and his student, the piping is produced by blowing air (i.e., the human breath) through human-made musical instruments or by the wind (i.e., the air or breath found on earth or in nature) blowing through the hollows and crevices of mountain trees. Thus, hearing the pipings of humans and the earth refers to hearing the music produced by the breath going through hollows. Given this, it seems odd for Zhuangzi to use the expression “listening with the breath” in the fasting of the heart parable. Surely “breath” here cannot refer to that which permeates a human body and the entire cosmos. So what might it really mean here?

I find the reading of this *qi* offered by a prominent twentieth-century intellectual historian of China particularly helpful. XU Fuguan 徐復觀 (1904–1982) says of *qi* in this parable: “In reality, the breath is nothing but a metaphor for the condition the heart is in. It is different from the purely physical concept of *qi* in the *Laozi* (i.e., *Dao De Jing*).”<sup>62</sup> To prevent the reader from taking *qi* to refer to a faculty within the body, Zhuangzi himself actually puts the following special sentence in his text: “The breath denotes that which is empty and awaits things (to appear).” He elaborates on this a little bit later by having Confucius tell Yan Hui to “follow along your ears and eyes to reach what is within, leaving your heart and knowledge on the outside.” We know now that the “heart” in this line is the already-formed heart, filled with human values. Once heart and knowledge are left on the outside, the authentic heart in the innermost region where Yan Hui should finally arrive is totally empty of anything human. Since the Way only abides in this sort of empty realm, Yan Hui is advised to remove all the artificial content his heart usually holds. Therefore, the fasting of the heart is not getting rid of the heart itself but keeping it in a totally empty condition, so that it is ever ready to respond to things in a spontaneous, pristine, and limitless fashion.

Zhuangzi ends the fasting of the heart parable without having his spokesperson Confucius indicate that Yan Hui has attained the Way. This is in keeping with his strategy of not allowing anybody to be able to fly without wings in the hazardous world of humans, the focus of chapter 4. What this parable offers is merely a first object lesson in how to become a perfected human being.

#### 4.9 Yan Hui Attains Sagehood Through Forgetting

Zhuangzi lets his reader wait until chapter 6, “The Great Source as Teacher,” to meet two people who successfully complete the process. The first person is Buliang Yi, who becomes a sage after putting Woman Crookback’s instruction into practice in

<sup>62</sup> This is quoted in CHEN Guying’s book (Chen 1983: 118) from XU Fuguan’s book (Xu 1963: 382). A good example of the usage of *qi* in the *Dao De Jing* is the following from chapter 10: “In concentrating your breath can you become as supple / As a babe?” (Lau 1963: 14).

the parable we have discussed previously. The second person is none other than Yan Hui who again appears with his teacher Confucius:

Yan Hui said, "I've made progress."

Confucius said, "What do you mean?"

"I've forgotten benevolence and righteousness."

"That's good. But you still have not attained your goal yet."

Another day, the two met again and Yan Hui said, "I've made progress."

"What do you mean?"

"I've forgotten rites and music."

"That's good. But you still have not attained your goal yet."

Another day, the two met again and Yan Hui said, "I've made progress."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm able just to sit and forget."

Greatly taken aback, Confucius said, "What do you mean by 'sit and forget'?"

Yan Hui said, "I let my limbs and organs drop away, expel my hearing and eyesight, detach from my physical form, cast off knowledge, and become identical with the Great Thoroughfare. This is what I mean by 'sit and forget.'"

Confucius said, "If you are identical with it, you have no more partiality, and if you let yourself transform, you have no more rigid norms. You really are that worthy! May I, Qiu, ask to follow behind you as your disciple?" (Qian 1989: 59–60; Watson 2013 modified: 52–53)

The above seems to pick up where the fasting of the heart parable left off. Throughout the previous story, Yan Hui appears to grasp every aspect of Confucius' teaching, but there is no indication that he has accomplished the fasting of the heart. The current story is found only in the *Zhuangzi*, not in any other early Chinese text. There is no doubt that it was invented by Zhuangzi to continue using the authority of Confucius to voice his own Daoist philosophy. It illustrates metaphorically the process of attaining what Zhuangzi regards as the highest level of spiritual development—very different from the process of self-cultivation advocated in Confucianism. While the Woman Crookback parable instantiates the Daoist process of attaining spiritual perfection through the "education" of a pupil with the talent of a Sage by someone who is already a Sage, the current parable demonstrates the same process being completed by a pupil known for his talent and learning in the Confucian tradition under the guidance of Confucius, who was himself upheld as a sage by Confucian scholars. In the former parable, Woman Crookback relates her experience to a third person (i.e., Nanbo Zikui), and her student remains silent throughout. By contrast, the latter parable consists of a conversation between Yan Hui and his teacher. Although exhibiting a good command of the knowledge of Daoist sagehood, Confucius is not a Sage by Zhuangzi's standard, because at the end of the parable, he begs Yan Hui to accept him as a disciple! The two parables clearly show Zhuangzi's skill at using variation in his writing.

Just like in the fasting of the heart parable, the current story starts off as a parody of the standard apprenticeship recorded in the *Analects*, in which students come to report to their teacher on their progress, ask questions, and seek further guidance. As the story proceeds, the tone becomes increasingly ironic. In Confucian self-cultivation, students are expected to internalize the ethical tenets until these become part of their personality so their actions are automatically guided by them. In this

story, however, Yan Hui, Confucius' smartest disciple, reports that he has forgotten benevolence, righteousness, rites and music, the four cardinal principles in Confucian ethics. For Zhuangzi, the process of learning—one that usually emphasizes internalizing ethics and acquiring new knowledge—becomes a process of un-learning as the disciple is here praised for being able to cast away what he has learned previously. This “un-learning” (forgetting) process forms the core of Daoist spiritual cultivation. Since in Daoism the touchstone of values is nature and not human, all humanly contrived knowledge and values must be abandoned, or, in the language of the fasting of the heart, “left on the outside,” so the innermost authentic heart will be kept intact and pristine.

At this juncture, I should like to bring up the section right before the current parable (i.e., the eighth section) that involves a similar dialogue. Because it is short but nonetheless important, I shall quote it in full:

Master Yier went to see Xu You. Xu You said, “What assistance has Yao given you?”

“Yao has told me,” Master Yier said, “you must submit yourself to benevolence and righteousness, and speak clearly of right and wrong.”

“What do you come here for, then?” Xu You said, “Since Yao has already branded you with benevolence and righteousness and cut off your nose with right and wrong, how do you expect to wander in the untrammelled, do-as-you-please, and ceaselessly changing paths?”

Master Yier said, “Even so, I wish to wander on the edge of his realm.”

“No way!” Xu You said, “The blind cannot relish the beauty of faces and features or appreciate the magnificence of colored and embroidered sacrificial robes.”

Master Yier said, “When Wuzhuang disregarded<sup>63</sup> her beauty, Juliang disregarded his strength, and the Yellow Emperor abandoned his knowledge, they did these from smelting and hammering. How do we know that the Thing Maker will not get rid of my branding marks and patch up my cut-off nose, so that I can take advantage of being made complete again to follow you, sir?”

“Ah! Nobody can know that,” Xu You said. “Let me tell you about the general outline. My Teacher! My Teacher! He blends the myriad things, but is not righteous; he extends his bounty to a myriad generations, but is not benevolent; he is of greater age than remote antiquity, but is not old; he covers heaven, bears up earth, and carves out all the shapes, but is not skillful. It is in this alone that we should wander. (Qian 1989: 59; Watson 2013 modified: 52)

This is an interesting parable, most likely made up by Zhuangzi himself. Involving three human characters, it belongs to the type “weighty words.” Of the three characters, Yao is a legendary ancient emperor revered especially in the Confucian tradition as a sage-king who abdicated the throne to Shun, Xu You a hermit living in Yao's time, and Master Yier a fictional character who only appears in this parable in the *Zhuangzi* and not anywhere else in extant pre-Qin texts. As mentioned earlier, YANG Rur-bin has suggested that Master Yier might be a personified version of the mythical swallow. But in this story, Zhuangzi bestows on him only the determination to learn how to wander (i.e., fly) in the untrammelled realm, not the ability to do

<sup>63</sup> The word Zhuangzi uses is *shi* 失 which means “lost.” I follow FUNG Yu-lan in translating *shi* as “disregard” (Fung 2016: 49). Victor Mair also translates *shi* as “disregard” (Mair 1994: 63). Fung's book was first published in 1928.

so. Xu You has appeared in one parable, and Yao in three, in “Free and Easy Wandering.” In one, Yao unsuccessfully tries to yield the throne to the adamantly uninterested Xu You (not Shun as in the commonly known legend); in the second, Yao is mentioned in a disparaging way as a sage-king in a conversation between Jian Wu and Lian Shu; and in the third, “Yao went to see the Four Masters of the faraway Guyi Mountain, [and upon returning, when he got to] north of the Fen River, he became bewildered and forgot his empire there.”<sup>64</sup> Earlier we saw Zhuangzi mention that “a Daemonic Person lives on faraway Guyi Mountain,” but here he does not explicitly indicate if the Four Masters are Daemonic Persons also. In just a few stories, we see that Zhuangzi presents Xu You and Yao in slightly varied ways. But what remain essentially the same is that Xu You is a lofty minded hermit, and Yao a sage-king.

In the Master Yier parable/variation, such virtues as benevolence and righteousness are metaphorically referred to as the traditional corporeal punishments of branding on face and nose mutilation for criminal offenses. Zhuangzi employs Xu You as his mask to say that these punishments can inflict physical and psychological scars on a person that prevent him from being able to wander freely and untrammelled. Wandering can only be achieved when a person casts off the branding and mutilation done to him/her in the teaching of human values and the rules of the ancient sage-kings. But Master Yier seems to believe that he might be able to rise above such scars to become a true wanderer, a person who can fly without wings. Obviously, Zhuangzi himself would support Master Yier’s confidence, since he has presented ideal figures who have been inflicted with deformities such as Deformed Shu, Lamé-Hunchback-No-Lips, or Woman Crookback or with corporeal punishment such as the amputees, Commander of the Right, Wang Tai, and Shentu Jia.

In the general outline describing “My Teacher,” Zhuangzi uses lines that echo those describing Dao elsewhere, including “he is of greater age than remote antiquity, but is not old,” the exact same line in Chinese which I have rendered as “It is of greater age than remote antiquity, but cannot be considered old,” in that previous context. It is beyond doubt that My Teacher is none other than the Way (or “The Great Source as Teacher” of the chapter title), previously mentioned as “the empty, the natural, and the unified whole” in the Mengsun Cai parable. Since by the end of the Master Yier parable, we do not see any clear hint of his or Xu You’s ability to fly, we can conclude that the parable ends with Xu You still being an apprentice of the Way.

Returning to the Yan Hui parable now, we can see that the irony culminates in Yan Hui’s attainment of sagehood not by embodying all ethical principles in his person (as what Yao has told Master Yier to do), but by having forgotten all of them and thereby transcending his limited self to become identical with the Way. “Limbs and organs” refer to the physical body that is transformable, and “hearing and

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<sup>64</sup>For the parable about Yao attempting to yield the throne to Xu You, see Qian 1989: 4; for being belittled, see Qian 1989: 5; and for Yao forgetting about his empire, see Qian 1989: 5. In addition to “Free and Easy Wandering” and “The Great Source as Teacher,” Yao also is mentioned three times as a king in the other chapters.

eyesight” refer to our sense perception that enables us to discriminate among things. Knowledge becomes the sum of what is learned as well as perceived by the heart and senses. Only by forgetting the bodily self, the opposition of this self to other things, and all knowledge is one able to enter the pristine state of the Way. Just like Buliang Yi, Yan Hui achieves this entirely through his own effort. But Zhuangzi does not end his story there. No matter how highly the historical Confucius regarded Yan Hui, it would be ludicrous for the teacher to ask his student to accept him as a disciple! In an entertaining way, then, Zhuangzi successfully uses Confucius and Yan Hui both as masks and Confucius alone as an object of ridicule. This satirical force aside, the ending line here also echoes Confucius’ remark in the Wang Tai story: “This master is a sage. I’ve just been tardy and haven’t gone to see him yet.” Clearly Yan Hui is also a Sage (without being so named by his teacher), and this time Confucius is ready to follow him, even though he was his very own student! We know that Wang Tai can “rise far up into the sky” and fly, and so by analogy we can be certain that Yan Hui has finally become a Sage possessing the same ability to fly.

#### ***4.10 The Mode of Life of the Supreme Ideal Figure***

Having dealt with how to become a Sage as presented across many parables, we can now return to discuss the mode of life characterized by forgetfulness and “wandering in the realm of the Way” touched upon in the Zi Sanghu story. The idea of forgetfulness is first brought up in this passage in the second section of “The Great Source as Teacher”:

When the springs dry up and the fish are left together on the land, they breathe on one another with moisture and wet one another with saliva. But it would be better for them to forget one another in the rivers and lakes.

Instead of praising Yao and condemning Jie, it would be better to forget both and transform them with the Way. (Qian 1989: 50; Watson 2013 modified: 44)

The above is echoed with some variation by the remark by Confucius in the Zi Sanghu parable:

Confucius said, “Fish thrive together in water and humans thrive together in the Way. For those that thrive in water, dig a pond, and they will find sufficient nourishment. For those that thrive in the Way, leave them to do nothing, and their life will be in peace. Thus, it is said, ‘Fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and humans forget one another in the arts of the Way.’” (Qian 1989: 57; Watson 2013 modified: 50)

By putting the above two passages one after the other, I wish to highlight a few important points. First, forgetfulness is raised in the context of concern with life and death. The fish cannot afford to forget about one another if they face the possibility of death, such as when they are left stranded on land. They can forget (or do not need to worry) about death if they are provided with sufficient water. Second, for fish merely to forget about death is not as good as for them to be able to forget one

another in the larger space within which they can roam freely. Third, Zhuangzi is not suggesting that we forget about the distinction between humans and fish—distinctions can be maintained as long as they remain on the natural level. Distinctions are unacceptable only when they are made on the basis of human interests and values. Fourth, Zhuangzi here only compares the Way—humans and water—fish, but while both having the indispensable life-sustaining power, the Way is not the same as water. For thinkers other than those of the Daoist disposition, the Way is steeped in an endless sequence of bifurcated human values of good and bad, right and wrong, light and dark, happy and sad, benevolent and cruel, life and death, and so on.

In the first passage quoted here, the benevolent Yao vs. the tyrannical Jie stand in for those bifurcated values. In Zhuangzi's expanded vision of ideal life, one would do well to forget (i.e., to go beyond, rise above) both Yao and Jie, to dissolve them in the unifying Way. This form of forgetfulness is important to Zhuangzi. He has his extremely deformed character *Lame-Hunchback-No-Lips* make this comment, "Therefore, if virtue (i.e., innate power) is preeminent, the body will be forgotten. But when people do not forget what can be forgotten and forget what cannot be forgotten—this may be called true forgetting" (Qian 1989: 40; Watson 2013 modified: 45). From the context of the story, we can tell that Zhuangzi uses "true forgetting" here to refer to something pejorative, something to be avoided. "What can be forgotten" alludes to *Lame-Hunchback-No-Lips*'s physical deformity while "what cannot be forgotten" is his preeminent innate power. Thus, for Zhuangzi, forgetting is a supreme form of art. I believe that the term *daoshu* 道術 (the arts of the Way), which appears only this once in the Inner Chapters, refers to this supreme form of art.<sup>65</sup> Confucius' most accomplished disciple Yan Hui, who is able to put the fasting of the heart to practice, becomes an Authentic Person, a master of forgetfulness, a person who flies without wings. The ideal mode of life characterized by forgetfulness and wandering in the realm of the Way is a mode of life in which humans are no longer fettered by artificial bifurcated values and thus can roam freely in a boundless realm.

#### 4.11 What Does the Last Inner Chapter's Title Mean?

The terseness of the seventh Inner Chapter's title "Ying di wang" 應帝王 has fueled much commentary and interpretation. GUO Xiang says, "The person who lets things run their natural course without any intention responds to (the occasion to) become an emperor or a king" (Wang and Guo 1962: 287).<sup>66</sup> WANG Fuzhi elaborates on Guo's comment as follows,

<sup>65</sup>N. J. Girardot has offered a fascinating reading of *daoshu* 道術 as "The Art of Mr. Hun-tun" (*hundun shi zhi shu* 混沌氏之術) by relating the term here to Chapter 21 of the *Zhuangzi* (Girardot 1974: 98–100).

<sup>66</sup>Guo Xiang's terse interpretation of the title "Ying di wang" has been taken to mean "(Who) Should Be Emperors and Kings." In his book, Zhong Tai 鍾泰 points out that the Qing scholar



*Ying* means when things happen to come, I respond to them. I do not intentionally appoint myself an emperor or a king but keep myself in the complete heavenly (i.e., natural) state, letting things follow their natural course to govern themselves. Then the world can never exit the Source (i.e., Dao, the Way) and will be governed. (Wang 1984: 70)<sup>67</sup>

The point Zhuangzi is making in this chapter is that a Daoist Sage merely responds to the occasion of being an emperor or a king, rather than intentionally seeking the throne. The term *diwang* 帝王 occurs once in the Inner Chapters, and only in this chapter title. It is important to note that it cannot be found in extant ancient Chinese texts earlier than the Inner Chapters; however, it does appear in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters and other texts like the *Xunzi*. In those later texts, *diwang* refers to rulers of states, and therefore can be translated as monarchs or kings in English. In the text of this chapter, *di* and *wang* appear in two separate sections, namely, the last section about the emperors of South Sea, North Sea and the Center, and the section in which Laozi and Yangzi Ju discuss the notion of “the enlightened king.” Elsewhere in the Inner Chapters, *di* is reserved for the very ancient concept of the Deified Ancestor or the Supreme Ruler of the cosmos and the term Huangdi (Yellow Emperor). To retain the separation of the two words as used in the chapter, I shall translate the title “Ying di wang” as “Responding to Being an Emperor or a King.” The opening section of Chapter 7 mentions Youyu Shi 有虞氏 (Clansman Youyu) and Tai Shi 泰氏 (Clansman Tai) who are taken by early commentators to refer to the sage-king Shun 舜 and a ruler of remote antiquity, even though Clansman Tai is depicted in language reminding us that he is a Sage (Qian 1989: 61). Interestingly, Zhuangzi does not use either *di* or *wang* to refer to them.

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XUAN Ying 宣穎 (fl. 1721) has read the title as “(Only the Sage) Should Be an Emperor or a King” (Zhong 1988: 167). And in his *Zhuangzi xin shi* 莊子新釋, Zhang Mosheng 張默生 (1895–1979) says, “The three characters ‘ying di wang’ mean ‘should be an emperor or a king.’ But how can one be an emperor or a king, or qualify to be an emperor or a king? This is not revealed in the title. Guo Xiang says, ‘those who have no intention but let things run their natural courses should be emperors and kings.’ This is a simple idea he draws after having read the entire chapter” (Zhang 1993: 228). To read *ying* 應 in “Ying di wang” as “should be” or “fit to be” seems incorrect. The character *ying* 應 occurs 54 times total in the entire *Zhuangzi* text, of which 5 times are in the Inner Chapters. With the exception of its occurrence in the title of this Inner Chapter, in all the other four occurrences (specifically, “以應無窮” [Qian 1989: 13] in Chapter 2, “則必有不肖之心應之” [Qian 1989: 33] in Chapter 4, “悶然而後應” [Qian 1989: 43] in Chapter 5, and “應而不藏” [Qian 1989: 66] in this Chapter 7), *ying* is used as a verb to mean “respond,” never as a word to mean “should be” or “fit to be.” It seems clear that in taking the word “ying” in the chapter title to mean “respond,” WANG Fuzhi is in keeping with the usage of the word in all the other occurrences in the Inner Chapters.

<sup>67</sup> This is the first portion of WANG Fuzhi’s general comment inserted after the title of the chapter (Wang 1984: 70).

## 4.12 *Zhuangzi's Political Views*

This seventh Inner Chapter articulates Zhuangzi's political views, which emphasize the king's governance through non-purposive action that lets things run their natural course. Zhuangzi was a philosopher who advocated the absolute spiritual freedom of the individual. He does not talk much about politics. When he does, he usually just utters his disgust at political powers. This is why, across the entire Inner Chapters, we find hardly any positive or favorable depictions of a political figure.

Some of the parables to be discussed here have been touched upon earlier in this article. I will reiterate some of the details again, though in the new context of this last Inner Chapter. As noted earlier, Zhuangzi mentions Yao, a sage-king worshiped by Confucius and Mencius, three times in "Free and Easy Wandering." The first comes after the lines "the Perfect Person has no-self, the Daemonic Person has no-merit, the Sage has no-name" and before the passage that starts with "Jian Wu asked Lian Shu." It is a story in which Yao wants to cede the throne to Xu You because he believes that Xu is more capable and benevolent than himself. But Xu You adamantly rejects the offer, saying that "I have no use for ruling the world!" (Qian 1989: 4). The second and third times Yao is mentioned are in the "Jian Wu asks Lian Shu" passage and the following short passage after that:

A man from the state of Song, who sold ceremonial hats, travelled to the state of Yue to market his goods. But the Yue people cut their hair short and tattoo their bodies. They had no use for hats. Emperor Yao brought order to the people in the world and unified governance within the seas. But when he went to see the Four Masters of faraway Guyi Mountain, north of the Fen River, he was bewildered and forgot his empire there. (Qian 1989: 5; Watson 2013: 5)<sup>68</sup>

To "bring order to the people in the world and unify governance within the seas" are the political achievements advocated by Confucian scholars. In the passage before this, Zhuangzi says through the mouth of Jie Yu, "There is a Daemonic Person living on faraway Guyi Mountain." Here, by saying that Yao went to see the Four Masters of Guyi Mountain, Zhuangzi perhaps intends to have his readers relate the Daemonic Person to these Four Masters. In light of this, we can argue that Yao was bewildered and forgot his empire, precisely because he met the Guyi Mountain masters. That Daemonic Person seems to be superior to Xu You, for he not only had "no use for ruling the empire," but also refused to "wear himself down over mundane affairs," and so "from his dust and dirt you could mold a Yao or a Shun!" (Qian 1989: 5). We may wonder what became of Yao after he forgot his empire? Did he become a hermit like Xu You, who thought ruling the world was of no use to him? Or had he already turned into a Daemonic Person? Zhuangzi does not say more about this, leaving his readers room to imagine for themselves. In my view, the three passages

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<sup>68</sup>In explaining "he was bewildered and had forgotten his empire there," LIN Xiyi says, "*Sang qi tianxia* 喪其天下 means he forgot his kingdom. *Yaoran* 惛然 means he was bewildered and lost his heart" (Lin 1997: 10). I think LIN Xiyi's explanation of *yao* 堯 and *sang* 喪 truly catches the gist of the two words.

in “Free and Easy Wandering” discussed here are meant to explicate “having no use.” Therefore, when Yao “forgot his empire,” he should have realized that the empire had no use for him. In the context of “Free and Easy Wandering,” which is all about spiritual freedom, the benefit that Yao gained from forgetting his empire was his own freedom. In addition to this, WANG Fuzhi discerns another layer of meaning. He argues,

If one sees his self internally, then externally he will see the empire. Those who think that they own the empire apply themselves to ruling the empire, taking the world as their own property, treating it as their own achievement, and embody it as their own merit... Those were all men of the Song state who travelled to Yue to sell the ceremonial hats, in the sense that they all lost their spiritual freedom because of their adherence to things. Those who cannot free themselves from things cannot obtain the true freedom. Only those who forget the world can truly gain the empire. If we let things go as they are, there is no place where they do not see fit to wander. (Wang 1984: 7)

WANG Fuzhi’s explanation is truly inspired, in the sense that it connects Yao’s oblivion to the empire with the ability of the Daemonic Person, the Perfect Person, and the Sage to achieve no-self, no-merit, and no-name. Maybe the character Yao, after visiting the Guyi Mountains, became the supreme ideal figure Zhuangzi envisioned to be best fit to rule the empire. But again, this is only conjecture, because Zhuangzi himself never clearly says that.

Whenever Zhuangzi discusses how one can be a good emperor in this chapter, he always talks through ideal Daoist figures but does not create specific characters to exemplify his point, with the exception of the last section. For instance, the following is the parable that constitutes the second section of the chapter:

Jian Wu went to see the madman Jie Yu.

“What did Zhong Shi say to you the other day?” said Jie Yu.

Jian Wu said, “He told me that a ruler of people puts out his own standards, regulations, and laws. Who would dare not to follow them and be transformed by them?”

“This is fake virtue! To govern the empire in this way is like wading through the ocean to try to dig a river, or to make a mosquito shoulder a mountain! When a Sage governs, does he govern what is on the outside? He makes his course straight first, and then he takes action. He makes sure that people can do their own things, and that is all. Birds fly high to escape the danger of aimed arrows, and field mice burrow deep under the Sacred Hill (i.e., name of the shrine of the land god) to avoid the danger of being dug or smoked out. Are you no match for these two little creatures? (Qian 1989: 63; Watson 2013 modified: 55–56)

The Chinese word that I have rendered “Sacred Hill” is *shenqiu* 神丘, of which the first character is the same as the *shen* in *shenren*, or Daemonic Person. But here it does not carry the sense of Daemonic, but rather the more general category of sacredness. Although the Sage (*shengren*) and the way he would govern are mentioned, here he is not given the superior power to wander and fly. Rather, he is used merely to counter the validity of the advice on government that Jian Wu has received, and the greater wisdom of staying away from politics, the source of danger.

Similarly in the fourth section, when Yangzi Ju 陽子居 goes to ask Lao Dan about the government of an enlightened king, Lao Dan says,

The government of an enlightened king? His achievements blanket the world but appear not to be his own doing. His transforming influence touches the myriad things, but the people

do not depend on him. He has achievements but nobody can name them. He lets everything find its own pleasure. He takes his stand on what cannot be fathomed and wanders where there is nothing at all. (Qian 1989: 63; Watson 2013 modified: 56–57)

These few sentences provide only an abstract statement about an enlightened king, who should have no-self, no-merit, and no-name, should govern by non-purposive action, and should be mysterious and unfathomable so that people do not know his true intention. This last quality seems to have its origin in the *Dao De Jing* which emphasizes the desirability of a ruler who is mysterious and unfathomable.

### 4.13 *The Ideal Person to Be an Emperor or a King*

The fifth, and longest, section of Chapter 7 is devoted to this theme of unfathomability in a ruler.<sup>69</sup> It tells a delightful story involving three characters: the philosopher Liezi, whom we have already encountered in Chapter 1 as a person who can ride the wind and fly in the air for fifteen days at a time; his teacher Huzi 壺子; and a shaman of the state of Zheng named Ji Xian 季咸, who is famous for his skill at physiognomy. Ji Xian's skill at facial reading was phenomenal. Evidently, he could tell whether people would live or die, would be fortunate or unfortunate, would live a long life or die young, with accuracy as if he were a god. When Liezi met Ji Xian, he was so infatuated that he returned to tell Huzi that the shaman possessed an even more perfect Way than his teacher. Huzi responded that he had only taught Liezi the outer forms, not yet the inner substance, of the Way. He then asked his student to invite Ji Xian to come and take a look at him. At the first meeting, Ji Xian predicted that Huzi would die in less than ten days' time. Huzi then revealed to Liezi that he had shown the shaman "the pattern of earth" and asked his student to invite the shaman to have another look at him. At the second meeting, Huzi appeared to the shaman as "heaven and earth," leading the shaman to judge that Huzi had miraculously gotten better. This was followed by two more meetings. At the third meeting, Huzi appeared as "the great void that exhibited no sign," leaving the shaman utterly stumped. And at the last meeting, he appeared as "having never exited the Source" (*weishi chu wuzong* 未始出吾宗, *wuzong* is literally "my or our Source") at which the shaman was at a total loss and fled.

After having heard the whole story from his teacher, Liezi felt that he had not yet learned anything. He went home and for three years never went out. He cooked for his wife, fed the pigs as if they were people, and most important of all, got rid of all elegant trappings and returned to being the uncarved block (*pu* 朴). He remained that way to the end of his life. In the parable, there is no comment whatsoever from the author as to the subject of being an emperor or king. So how should we interpret the parable?

<sup>69</sup>The parable can be found in Qian 1989: 63–66, and for a translation of it in English, see Watson 2013: 57–59.

I find WANG Fuzhi's explanation, which assesses this parable in the context of the chapter and the Inner Chapters as a whole, most cogent. As he notes on "The Great Source as Teacher": "It is not what those with personal intelligence and small talent that can [only] distinguish right and wrong, order and disorder, advantages and disadvantages, as well as fortune and misfortune can ever fathom" (Wang 1984: 70). Pushing the point further, right after the shaman of Zheng parable, WANG Fuzhi offers a long and remarkably illuminating commentary. Below are the most pertinent and helpful remarks:

(Since Huzi) "never exits the Source," he will find himself at the center of the circle so he can respond to things endlessly; even though he does not seek to order the world, the world can never escape his ordering.

Cultivators will do their cultivating, weavers their weaving, ritualists their rites and ceremonies, and executioners their executions, and they will each be at peace with what they are destined to do. Past kindness, old scores, and killings are not carried out through personal cleverness in accordance with one person's limited knowledge. This is one who wanders where there is nothing at all, and who has achievements for which nobody can even come up with names. This is one who follows things as they are without any partiality and makes sure that people can do their own things...

This is one who can insert a blade that has no thickness into where there are spaces and blends ten thousand years and unites them into one. This is one who knows without knowledge, and whose heart is an empty, bright room where auspiciousness comes to rest, and where no grief or joy ever enters. This is one who can mount on the true course of Heaven and Earth, ride the changes of the six breaths, and wander in the realm of the boundless. Huzi stands in the unfathomable realm, so how can even the "god-like" shaman ever figure him out? ...

He who never exits the Source does not simply establish from his knowledge and opinion a source of trivial achievement. There is no realm, large or small, in which he cannot roam, no discussions on things he cannot make equal, no innate powers he cannot make full, no life he cannot nurture, no death he cannot forget, no world of humans he cannot enter. This is the Source of the indivisible "Ultimate One" (*zhiyi* 至一). What (else) is there with which one can respond to being an emperor or a king? (Wang 1984: 74)

I am sure the attentive reader will catch in the above passage all the echoes from the Inner Chapters. One such echo needs to be highlighted. WANG Fuzhi's remark that "he will find himself at the center of the circle so he can respond to things endlessly" echoes this statement in "Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal": "A state in which 'this' and 'that' no longer find their counterparts is called the pivot of the Way. Once the pivot is found at the center of the circle, it can respond endlessly. Its right, then, is a single endlessness, and its wrong, too, is a single endlessness" (Qian 1989: 13; Watson 2013 modified: 10). Having transcended their limited selves, Zhuangzi's supreme ideal persons know and accept the workings of nature, in such a way that the bifurcated human values of this and that, right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, joy and sadness, even life and death no longer form opposites.

They can do this because they are able to hold fast to the middle course, the pivot of the Way, in whatever they do. The Source and the indivisible Ultimate One refer to the Way.

As the modern scholar Zhong Tai 鍾泰 (1888–1979) has incisively observed, there is a subtle parallel between those who can “mount on the true course of Heaven and Earth, ride the changes of the six breaths, and wander in the realm of the boundless” (from “Free and Easy Wandering”) and “once the pivot (of the Way) is found at the center of the circle, it can respond endlessly” (from “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal”) (Zhong 1988: 167). There is no question that Huzi is one of Zhuangzi’s supreme ideal figures, even though he is not directly depicted as a person who flies without wings.

In the sixth section, Zhuangzi gives another abstract statement about the Perfect Person:

Do not be the host of fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be the servant of things; do not be the master of knowledge. Embody the limitless to its full extent, and wander where there is no trace of things.

Exhaust all that you have received from Heaven but be free of possession and remain empty. The Perfect Person uses his heart like a mirror—reaching out for nothing and welcoming nothing. He responds but retains nothing.

Therefore, he can prevail over things and receive no harm. (Qian 1989: 66; Watson 2013 modified: 59)

If we read this passage carefully, it should not be hard to discern that Zhuangzi once again uses variation on many previously discussed concepts, such as no-self, no-merit, no-name, emptiness, abandonment of knowledge, and wandering in the infinite. What is especially worth pointing out here is the phrase “wander where there is no trace of things.” According to GUO Xiang’s annotation, “There is no trace because he lets things be.” CHENG Xuanying’s explanation expands on this annotation, “*Zhen* 朕 means traces. Though he wanders across the world and helps numerous people, he hides his footprints and conceals his brightness, therefore he leaves no trace” (Wang and Guo 1962: 308). Whether Zhuangzi indeed intends to use this sentence to depict, as Cheng explains, an ideal emperor who “helps numerous people” is a conclusion I do not want to jump to quickly. However, that *wuzhen* 無朕 means “no symptom or trace” is beyond doubt. In light of this, the phrase “wander where there is no trace of things” in fact corresponds to “he takes his stand on what cannot be fathomed” in the fourth section. This correspondence is quite appropriate, because this chapter is all about emperors and kings, and Zhuangzi believes that such a figure should be able to remain unfathomable.

#### 4.14 *The Last Reiteration of the Main Theme*

Now let us take up one other example from this chapter. In the third section, Heaven’s Root (Tiangen 天根) asks Nameless Person (Wumingren 無名人), “Please, may I ask how to rule the world?” Nameless Person immediately retorts,

“Go away, you vulgar person! What a dreary question! I am just about to become a companion with the Thing Maker. [Once] I have had enough of that, I will mount on the back of the bird of distance and void, go out beyond the poles of the six directions, wander in Not-

Even-Anything Village, and live in the Field of Boundlessness. How dare you come to agitate my heart with talk about governing the world?" But Heaven's Root asked again. Nameless Person replied, "If you let your heart wander in limpidity, blend your breath with vastness, follow things the way they are, and make no room for selfish bias, then the world will be governed." (Qian 1989: 62; Watson 2013 modified: 56)

This is the second time in the Inner Chapter that a supreme ideal figure comes out to directly talk about his ability to fly. Nameless Person here and the three friends (Zi Sanghu, Meng Zifan, and Zi Qinzhang) are the only figures in the Inner Chapters who directly talk about their ability to fly. Here Zhuangzi manages to combine many interrelated images about flying and wandering in the infinite, and remolds them into a new skillful variation on this theme: Other than the phrase "become companion with the Thing Maker," which exactly repeats wording in "The Great Source as Teacher"; the "bird of distance and void" echoes in fact the giant Peng in "Free and Easy Wandering"; the phrase "six directions" is used to replace such phrases as the "four seas" and "the world of dust"; "Not-Even-Anything Village" and the "Field of Boundlessness" are both variations on the place where Zhuangzi recommends Huizi go to plant his giant but useless tree at the end of "Free and Easy Wandering." All these variations woven into mutually resonating passages show how truly marvelous is his writing skill!

Once Nameless Person has stated his abilities, Heaven's Root persists in asking how to rule the world. In response to that Nameless Person gives only an abstract response. As long as Heaven's Root maintains a peaceful heart of non-purposive action, follows along with things as they are, and leaves no room for selfish thoughts, the world can be governed through no governance. But Zhuangzi never directly provides any examples of such rulers. In the Huzi parable, Zhuangzi stops short of letting this person who has never exited the Source "respond to being an emperor or a king." In "Free and Easy Wandering," when he states that Yao forgot his empire, he does not explain what happened to him afterward. Moreover, none of the supreme ideal figures depicted in the Inner Chapters, whose accomplishments and abilities far surpass Yao, is willing to "wear themselves down over mundane affairs." Zhuangzi was a smart man who lived in a chaotic time of the Warring States Period. Possibly because he wanted to protect himself and stay away from troubles in his pursuit for the absolute spiritual freedom, he chose to despise all political engagements in the real world. It is therefore quite understandable that none of the supreme ideal figures created by him in his writings is a politician.

#### **4.15 *The Grand Finale***

In the parable that concludes not only this chapter but also the entire Inner Chapters in the *Zhuangzi* text although there is no replay of the flying theme, it circles back to the idea of the supreme ideal figure and Zhuangzi's vision of the ideal world in significant ways. The whole parable runs as follows:



The Emperor of the South Sea was Swift (Shu), the Emperor of the North Sea was Sudden (Hu), and the Emperor of the Center was Chaos (Hundun). From time to time, Swift and Sudden got together in Chaos's territory, and Chaos treated them very graciously. Swift and Sudden discussed how to repay Chaos's kindness. They said, "People all have seven openings with which to see, hear, eat, and breathe. Chaos alone does not have any. Let's try boring him some."

Every day they bored a hole, and on the seventh day Chaos died. (Qian 1989:66; Watson 2013 modified: 59)

This parable has been well studied by a number of eminent British and European sinologists from the perspectives of myth, shamanism, religion, philosophy, and cultural history. These studies have been thoroughly reviewed by N. J. Girardot in his book *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: The Theme of Chaos (hun-tun)*.<sup>70</sup> For readers interested in the larger implications of this parable, please read Girardot's brilliant treatment in this book. I shall approach the parable from the narrower concern of a literary scholar and discuss it in the context of the issues and themes I have been investigating here. Below is Max Kaltenmark's succinct description of Chaos as presented in Zhuangzi's parable:

Chaos had the perfection of a sphere: it possessed the original simplicity (*p'u*) of an undifferentiated being, the autonomy of the embryo, which is a concentration of life folded in upon itself. An untimely zeal would wish to make it like everybody else and initiate it into civilized life by giving it the sense organs that destroy its unity. The myth is a perfect symbol of the Founding Kings' original sin. (Kaltenmark 1969: 101)

First, we can view Chaos as a variation on "the Source" referred to by Huzi, which is itself a variation on the Dao, the Way, as I have discussed in the preceding pages. Second, this undifferentiated being, Chaos, is a perfect metaphor for the state of Yan Hui's heart after he has accomplished the fasting of the heart and is able to just sit and forget. It is a heart in its pristine state, devoid of all human values. Arthur Waley describes this heart in a slightly different way: "Chuang Tzu's (i.e., Zhuangzi's) symbol for this state of pure consciousness which sees without looking, hears without listening, knows without thinking, is the god Hun-tun ('Chaos')" (Waley 2005: 97).<sup>71</sup> Indeed, for Zhuangzi, authentic perception seems to go through a process opposite to our usual reliance on our senses and thoughts (which are both saturated in human values). The heart kept in its perpetually pristine state enables its possessor to respond to things as they come, never to reach out for them or retain them afterwards. Third, for Swift and Sudden to think Chaos has treated them well, they make a value judgment on a spontaneous and non-purposive action. And their payback for that kindness by giving him what they think he lacks is clearly purposive action. Fourth, we can say that the impetuous purposive action of the two emperors results in a preliminary recognition of the ethical values of benevolence (Chaos' kindness) and righteousness (reciprocation of kindness). Fifth, for the early Daoist thinkers including Laozi and Zhuangzi, the initiation of the primordial

<sup>70</sup> See especially Chapter 3, "Bored to Death: The 'Arts of Mr. Hun-tun' in the *Chuang Tzu*" (Girardot 1974: 77–133).

<sup>71</sup> This is a reprint of the book first published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd in London in 1939.

undifferentiated being into civilized life ordered by human values (as instantiated in Swift and Sudden's boring seven facial openings on Chaos) amounts to the destruction of the unity and harmony of unspoiled nature. This is why the parable ends with the death of Chaos.

ZHONG Tai has observed that the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* begin with the idea of wandering (*you* 遊) and end with that of responding (*ying* 應), forming a nice parallel (Zhong 1988: 167). "Free and Easy Wandering" opens with the description of the gigantic Kun fish of Northern Darkness changing into the gigantic Peng bird before migrating to the Southern Darkness, while the parable that concludes "Responding to Being an Emperor or a King" opens with "The Emperor of the South Sea was Swift (Shu), the Emperor of the North Sea was Sudden (Hu), and the Emperor of the Center was Chaos (Hundun)." Other than the fact that the locations of the seas in the respective passages constitute a mirror image, there is no parallel idea or imagery between them. A question suggests itself: Why does Zhuangzi not make Chaos fly? Certainly Chaos, who embodies the Source, should be able to fly without wings. Instead, our author ends the final Inner Chapter with the word *si* 死 (death). There is a simple answer to this question. Living in the chaotic mid-Warring States period, Zhuangzi seems unable to prevent his postlapsarian vision of the world from coloring his writings. It is not that Chaos cannot fly, but our author does not want him to, I believe.

## 5 Conclusion

As I have discussed in the preceding pages, except for "The Principle of Nurturing Life" and "The World of Humans," the other chapters of the Inner Chapters all contain direct descriptions of the supreme ideal figure. The ultimate ideal personality that Zhuangzi aspired to is embodied in this figure, who first cultivates then enjoys absolute spiritual freedom. That two of the chapters do not contain any direct depictions of this figure is possibly due to the fact that the former focuses on how to preserve one's life and the latter aims to explain how to avoid dangers in a chaotic world.

Neither chapter places emphasis on Zhuangzi's pursuit of the ultimate ideal personality. However, even in these chapters, there is no lack of description around wandering, a representation of the absolute spiritual freedom closely connected to the themes of the chapters. The other five chapters contain many passages that directly depict the supreme ideal figure, and these mostly correspond with and supplement each other in different ways. The wording and descriptions in those passages are either completely identical or similar with slight variations. In addition to the theme of wandering, Zhuangzi depicted how some especially talented individuals attained the stature of the supreme ideal figure. I have devoted considerable space to those depictions.

For this article I have deployed a term from film music theory, namely, the technique of variation on a theme, to illustrate one important technique used by Zhuangzi

in composing the Inner Chapters. Thanks to all the corresponding details and the recurring flying theme, depictions of the supreme ideal figure scattered throughout the Inner Chapters resonate to become a group of unified variations. I have tried to identify these skillful adjustments across Zhuangzi's storytelling to help us appreciate the internal coherence and unity of the Inner Chapters. Zhuangzi's mastery at variation truly makes him one of the greatest prose writers in the history of Chinese literature.

### Author's Note

This is an English translation of an article first published in Lin 2005: 1–35 and later collected in my book *Through a Window of Dreams* (Lin 2009: 95–133). In my most recent review of that fine translation, prepared by Professor Gang Liu of Carnegie Mellon University, I have emended and expanded the now almost fifteen-year-old article. These revisions mostly reflect my newer understanding of the *Zhuangzi* text, which grew out of my writing “Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose: The Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*” included in the collected volume edited by Zong-qi Cai, *How to Read Chinese Prose: A Guided Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022). I did not feel the need to make changes to the central argument of the present piece; however, I wish to mention noteworthy works in Chinese by three contemporary scholars that I only recently encountered, which have contributed to my thinking.

First, WANG Zhongling 王鍾陵 attempts to correct previous commentators' errors by taking the three terms, *sheng* 聖 or *shengren* 聖人 (Sage), *zhiren* 至人 (Perfect Person) and *shenren*, 神人 (Daemoniac Person), as components of an organic whole and discusses anew the spirit and cultural significance of Zhuangzi's philosophy of “free and easy wandering.” Although Wang treats these three terms from the perspective of a traditional Chinese rhetorical device, *hu wen xian yi* (互文見意), by which the former part and the parts that follow in a statement or passage conjoin to reveal a unified meaning, he believes that they still have their own particular emphases, and that Zhuangzi advocates two—the superior versus the inferior—kinds of “free and easy wandering” (Wang 1996: 67–71). In my opinion, while WANG Zhongling's correction of previous mistakes is well taken, his view of a hierarchy of spiritual freedom runs counter to Zhuangzi's philosophy of the “equality of all things,” as powerfully expressed in “Making All Things, and the Discussions on Them, Equal.”

Second, YANG Chengfu 楊成孚 presents a cogent analysis of these three terms as denoting the same ideal personality. Yang approaches the issue from two angles: (1) he follows WEN Yiduo's 聞一多 (1899–1946) idea of *hu wen yi zu yi* 互文以足義 (the first part and the parts that follow in a passage conjoin to present a complete and unified meaning); (2) he uses passages concerned with the three terms in Chapter 33, “The World” (*Tianxia* 天下), and other chapters throughout the *Zhuangzi* to support his observation. *Hu wen yi zu yi* is actually a rephrasing of *hu wen xian yi* (互文見義) (Yang 1995: 54–62).

Third, YANG Rur-bin 楊儒賓 expands far beyond the scope of his earlier work (Yang 1989: 223–253) to investigate the probable connection between the *Zhuangzi* and the ancient Eastern Coastal culture of shamanism (specifically that of coastal

regions bordering the present-day Bohai Sea, regions occupied by the states of Yan and Qi during the Warring States Period). Professor Yang presents a wealth of compelling information for his argument that the thinker and writer Zhuangzi takes some elements from the culture of shamanism to structure the central portion of his discourse and at the same time transforms them to express his own philosophy (Yang 2007: 43–70).

The articles by YANG Chengfu and YANG Rur-bin are both remarkable.

Last but not least, the author and the translator wish to thank Terre Fisher for her expert editing, which has gone far beyond stylistic fine-tuning to offer perceptive suggestions concerning a number of larger issues in good academic writing.

—Shuen-fu Lin, updated in April 2022

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**Part IV**  
**Zhuangzi in the Context of Chinese**  
**Philosophy**



# Chapter 15

## Zhuangzi and Laozi: An Intertextual Approach



Daniel Fried

### 1 Introduction and Methodology

Everyone “knows” that LAO Dan 老聃 (Laozi 老子) was the founder of Daoism, and that ZHUANG Zhou 莊周 (Zhuangzi 莊子) was the second great Daoist thinker. Hence the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* that “they” “wrote” are usually treated jointly, as the two earliest and most important Daoist texts.

The two texts have been treated as closely associated with each other from at least the Han dynasty, to the point where the *Zhuangzi* has been treated as an expansion on the exact same ideas expressed in the *Laozi*, albeit in more playful and literary language. From the early versions of religious Daoism born in the Later Han and Six Dynasties period, Laozi was given a supreme role in the pantheon as the “Supreme Lord Lao” (*taishang laojun* 太上老君), and Zhuangzi recognized as a major saint, as the “Perfected Man of Southern Splendor” (*nanhua zhenren* 南華真人). To this day, “Lao-Zhuang Thought” (*laozhuang sixiang* 老莊思想) is often used as a casual synonym for “early Daoism”—and perhaps it is the superior term, given its greater specificity.

And it must be clear that this traditionally close association is correct, to some degree: these two texts do have an important relationship. We do not need to rely on external Han-era (or later) appraisals to reach such conclusions. Many of the themes, and some of the specific philosophical conclusions voiced by the two texts are clearly in harmony. Laozi is a character who appears repeatedly in the text of the *Zhuangzi*, and is treated with deference each time, as an authority figure who dispenses wisdom. Other characters who appear in the text, especially Confucius, are either shown up in encounters with Laozi, or made to voice Laozi’s sentiments rather than their own (or, more precisely, voice the sentiments which the *Zhuangzi*

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imagines as being those of Laozi). And the actual text of the *Laozi* is either echoed or directly cited repeatedly throughout the *Zhuangzi*. The important question is what we make of such links—are these two texts really composed by the founder of a school and his first great follower, with some minor later interpolations and revisions? Or perhaps were these completely unrelated texts whose apparent links were added later?

It is always helpful to question received notions about ancient texts, especially those with murky origins, and whose place in the history of thought was only defined at the same time as standard editions were being collated. Such questioning does not need to be radically revisionist in order to be clarifying. Although there is little evidence that the historical Zhuang Zhou thought of himself as an adherent of a school named “Daoism” which had been founded by Lao Dan, there is no need to conclude that the later, retrospective grouping of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* is a senseless one. These two sets of texts really do deserve to be considered together.

What needs to be stressed is that the relationship of these two texts is not a simple one. The notion of “Lao-Zhuang Thought” not only elides important differences between each text, it also effaces the multiplicity within each text caused by their fluidity during the first few centuries of circulation. And it also hides the multiple links, of different kinds, which each text has to other early works of pre-Qin philosophy. If we treat the traditional association of the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* with suspicion, and start without an assumption that the texts must belong together as the founding moments of a philosophical school, the result will not be a radically rewritten history of Chinese philosophy, but perhaps a more nuanced portrait. Such will be the aim of this essay.

Before beginning, however, it is important to note that the dating of the *Laozi*—a truly vexing question—will not be a primary consideration here. For the sake of expository convenience, the *Laozi* will be described here as prior to the *Zhuangzi*, and a source of possible influence for it. This is not an outrageous assumption: the *Zhuangzi* clearly references the *Laozi* and its author in various ways, and the *Laozi* references no external text. However, there is zero external evidence for a text of the *Laozi* in common circulation before the earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi* were composed, and in 1989, A.C. Graham presented a model in which the *Zhuangzi* was the prior text, largely on the basis of the *Laozi* not being attested before the mid-third century. (Graham 1989) With the discovery of the Guodian slips in 1993, this pushed back the date of the text to before 300 BC, but it has still been possible to argue that the *Laozi* was still undergoing major reconfiguring until the Western Han. (Kim 2012) That being the case, it is important to remember that “influence from the *Laozi*” could in fact mean a much more complex, and now largely-invisible, process of mutually-influential collation of texts of the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*. For the sake of simplicity, the question of priority will be bracketed through most of the following discussion, and intertextual linkages between the two will be discussed in terms of possible “influence” of the *Laozi* on the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, this essay will end by endorsing a mildly conservative version of that traditional ordering; but the issues are not simple, and discussion of the point will be reserved until the conclusion, once intertextual evidence has been presented.

Intertextual evidence will be highlighted throughout this discussion, in a fashion similar to that used by LIU Xiaogan 劉笑敢 in his study of intra-*Zhuangzi* dating and classification. (Liu 1994) However, the present study, which has relied on computer-assisted sorting to identify intertexts,<sup>1</sup> uses a somewhat different range of examples than those identified by Liu through what seems to have been impressive feats of more traditional erudition. The dataset in the linked digital archive contains many examples of shorter turns of phrase, even patterns of individual vocabulary items, than those used by Liu; on the other hand, all data used in this study relies on actual textual consonance, rather than (in some cases) what are judged to be similar ideas. One must admit, the method is strikingly un-Zhuangzian: we risk running afoul of the anti-Mohist warning about the “mechanical mind” (*jixin* 機心) if we simply abdicate exegesis for computerized tabulation of unimportant words.<sup>2</sup> Donald Munro critiques this approach (as used elsewhere by Graham) in a foreword to the English edition of Liu’s work, saying, “there is certainly not enough guidance as to why we should take them as evidence that certain fragments were written by a given author.” (Liu 1994: xix) Hence a preliminary word is necessary to begin about the evidentiary value of fragments; further discussion will continue below in the discussion of the different types of evidence collected.

The shorter and more common a phrase shared by two texts, the more one must consider it simply part of the given language of a society; the longer such a shared text is, the more likely that it should be considered a deliberate quote or appropriation. However, the boundaries between “shorter” and “longer” are highly fluid, and can be pushed to extremes by context. “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” is a long and specific phrase, but an attempt to locate a specific source for it would perhaps be hopeless, and certainly irrelevant to contemporary usage. On the other hand, certain individual words can be so unusual that they necessarily invoke specific literary works (*rosyfingered*, *incarnadine*, *doubleplusungood*). It is very difficult to isolate what counts as “language” and what counts as “citation” in archaic Chinese, and hence no individual text should be given too much weight. However, if one repeatedly sees patterns of certain words and phrases that are used in some pre-Qin texts, and not in others, then it is not unreasonable to consider this as evidence of a real linkage. Moreover, the difficult judgment calls required to consider intertextual evidence are not inherently more dubious than thematic consideration of philosophical positions, which occupies much discussion of the relation of early writers.

Some explanation is appropriate for why this study deliberately downplays comparison of the philosophical positions of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, in favor of measuring intertextual linkages. It is not because the content of philosophical influence is unimportant: their philosophical positions are, after all, the reason why these

<sup>1</sup> This dataset has been uploaded to the ERA database of the University of Alberta Libraries, and is available at <https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-qksn-yt25>.

<sup>2</sup> Kuang-ming Wu, writing long before the advent of digital humanities, once used this passage to draw a critical distinction between the “machine mind” and Zhuangzian cognition. (Wu 1982: 48–57).

texts remain of interest. Ultimately, one must understand texts, not just tabulate them, and understanding transcends individual vocabulary choices. For example, when Frank W. Stevenson suggests that the allegory of Chaos being carved to death may owe something to Laozi's "uncarved block", (Stevenson 2008: 92) this reading from content produces much more reasonable results than if we were to track *Zhuangzi*'s keyword "carve" (zao 鑿) back to its lone use in *Laozi*, where it is the salutary action one takes to create useful emptiness in the form of doors and windows. And this study does not and cannot banish any consideration of meaning from the question of what constitutes an intertext.

With that said, there are two reasons why this study tries to eschew arguments about whether the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* are philosophically similar, independent of any direct intertextual evidence.

First, no one study can do everything, this one is already quite long in considering intertextual evidence alone, and there is no shortage of other scholarship that addresses the possibility of such links. Since 2015 alone, English-language scholarly articles have addressed such topics as: the common attitudes of both texts toward nature (Chai 2016; Liu 2016) or toward ecological civilization (Doyle 2021); their common opposition to non-dichotomous thinking (Sta. Maria 2017); the attitude of both works toward the role of the senses (Fech 2019); or towards time (Jhou 2020); their ideas relating to literary criticism (Leonard 2017); and the common distance of both from the *Analects* (D'Ambrosio 2020), to name only a few. There are many dozens of papers on the topic over the same period in Chinese, as well as in other Western and Asian languages. And of course there have long been important discussions of the philosophical commonalities of the two texts in influential surveys from FENG Youlan 馮友蘭, to Graham, to Kirkland. (Feng 1930; Graham 1989; Kirkland 2004)

Secondly, while there is a subjective element in judging what should count as an intertext, it is considerably more difficult to set a standard for judging similarity of philosophical positions that could be precise enough to measure a pattern of influence, apart from any biographical data or textual links. Even setting aside the dubiously logocentric notion that there can be "content" comparable without reference to the actual words used by two texts, the same issue could be easily judged as showing similarity or difference, depending on the predilections of the interpreter. To take an obvious example: both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* clearly voice suspicions of the representational power of language. However, the *Laozi* is most interested in the inability of the true Dao to be encapsulated by the sign *dao* 道; while the *Zhuangzi* is not much interested in that word, and instead questions analytical categories and logical distinctions of the Logicians and Mohists. So: is this a similarity, or a difference? Could it be used to prove, or to disprove, a filiative link between the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*?

Instead of pursuing such questions, this essay will begin from a granular examination of intertexts which link the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Although it is possible for similar ideas to be expressed in radically different language, it is rare in literate cultures for later writers not to invoke the actual words of earlier texts when they are actually exerting intellectual influence. Hence, although an imperfect proxy,

intertextual linkages between the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* can serve as a reasonable indicator of which portions of the *Laozi* were most influential upon which portions of the *Zhuangzi*. The next section of this essay will examine such evidence in detail, and propose a number of conclusions regarding how the influence of the *Laozi* upon “Zhuang Zhou” relates to the ultimate formation of the final version of the *Zhuangzi*.

There is, of course, other important evidence for the relation of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* besides verifiable intertexts: we have a number of representations of this relationship from external sources, as well as several invocations of Lao Dan as a character within the *Zhuangzi*. However, this evidence largely derives from a middle period in the evolution of the *Zhuangzi*, and hence will be examined in a later section, after certain patterns in intertextual usages have been established. The essay will then conclude with an examination of how the relationship of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* is related to both texts’ relationships with other pre-Qin works, and to their eventual construction as the founding works in a school called “Daoism”.

## 2 Lao-Zhuang Intertexts and the Contours of Influence

The problem of exegetical projection is ameliorated by inspection of intertexts, but it is not solved, because the decision as to what should count as an intertext is still a hermeneutical one. When the “Under Heaven” (*tianxia* 天下) chapter directly quotes Laozi (“Lao Dan said, ‘Know the male, hold to the female...’” etc.), that is clearly an intertext, even if the actual quotation mangles its putative source in *Laozi* 28. On the other hand, simple use of the word, *dao*, could hardly be counted as such: despite its central importance to *Laozi*, it is also a common part of the philosophical vocabulary of the Warring States. But in between such obvious extremes, there is a vast and murky middle ground, in which only the individual reader’s judgment is sufficient to label certain repeated phrases and textual patterns either significant or coincidental. How many characters must one find together to be sure that a given phrase demonstrates meaningful influence? Should intertexts be counted as evidence of influence solely on the basis of similar phrasing, or must the passages in question seem central to the main point of a passage? And what would count as an “objective” standard for deciding such issues?

The following evidence of Lao-Zhuang intertextuality has been collected in ways which circumscribe subjectivity, without eliminating it. Multiple digital versions of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* were compared against each other using commercially available software, set to run proximity searches so that not only individual keywords, but also similarly-phrased passages could be identified. Among the results which were returned, some were discarded which seemed to be pure coincidence, such as passages which had three identical characters separated by wide gaps, with no other correlation in the sense. Other passages were then discarded which were clearly artifacts of classical Chinese grammar (e.g., *zhi suo yi* 之所以). Among the matches which remained, those which were not clearly direct quotes were then used to run database searches across the entire corpus of pre-Qin

materials, and terms were again eliminated in which it was clear there could be multiple sources for the *Zhuangzi* other than the *Laozi* itself.

The remaining results (compiled in the appendix to this chapter, and made available on the ERA depository of the University of Alberta Libraries) cannot be considered a definitive list of all possible Lao-Zhuang intertexts: other readers faced with the same data set might be more or less inclusive in their judgments of what might represent a “real” moment of influence. However, they should be complete enough to count as a representative sample, on the basis of which several general propositions can be made about the nature of the Lao-Zhuang relationship. There are numerous texts in this data set that have been very familiar to scholars for millennia, well-remarked upon in commentaries, and that can serve to partially confirm standard narratives about the initial formation of Daoism. There are other intertexts that have rarely been noticed—as well as patterns to the location and usage of those intertexts that have rarely been noticed—and these suggest alternative ways of recasting that early history of the school.

Because the body of evidence under examination here is one that aims to minimize subjectivity, but does not pretend to eliminate it, it cannot claim the same precision as studies such as that of David McCraw in his study of rhyme in stratifying the *Zhuangzi*. (McCraw 2010) Although historical linguistics remains speculative in some areas, most possible rhymes do not simply reduce to subjective judgment. As a result, the analytical methods used here cannot be as technical or rigorous as those used by McCraw: running a regression analysis on a dataset without firmly defined data would produce only an illusion of precision.

Instead, I have chosen to use an analytical framework that will impose some rigor upon my own judgments, while also laying these bare, and making it easier for other readers to come to alternate conclusions if they have differing judgments about which intertexts should “count”. To this end, the set of discovered intertexts have been divided into four types, which will be discussed separately.

First among these are echoes of grammatical structure: words, phrases, or patterns that do not seem particularly significant in themselves, but that are not found in any other early texts besides the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. These are potentially the result of coincidence; but one could also propose models by which certain cadences of phrasing in well-studied passages of the *Laozi* were perhaps unconsciously replicated by Zhuang Zhou or his followers, or in which unstable texts evolved from the *Laozi* into the *Zhuangzi* through multiple recopyings. No individual example from this type will be given any great weight, though in the aggregate they do have some relevance.

The second type is of keywords. This includes obvious and famous terms such as “non-action” (*wu wei* 無為) but also other terms, much-less noticed, which the textual record shows are unique to the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*.

The third type is of borrowed phraseology, examples of what are the more familiar or standard kind of “intertext” as that word is usually employed. This can include passages from three or four characters up to entire sentences, and for which one could propose multiple etiologies, with the caveat that it is always fairly obvious that these linkages are not coincidental.

The fourth and final type is of intended quotations, usually marked by “X said” (*yue* 曰) or “this is what is called” (*shi wei* 是謂). Not all of these quotations are either correct, or correctly attributed to Lao Dan, but they do all at least echo passages from the *Laozi*, and are presented to the reader as having a source elsewhere.

Examples from each of these four types will be discussed below, but it is important here to mention a few general tendencies which can be noted across the whole set of discovered texts.

(i) Disparate rates and character of intertexts between sections

Although there certainly are several important examples of intertextuality present in the Inner Chapters, the average number of intertexts per chapter is much higher in the Outer Chapters (2.6 compared to 7.1)<sup>3</sup>. Despite the impossibility of drawing precise borders around what should or should not count as an intertext, this is a striking discrepancy. Furthermore, the Inner Chapters contain exactly zero examples of explicit, attributed quotations of the *Laozi*, while these are plentiful in the later sections of the book. In part, these patterns support Graham’s hypothesis of a “primitivist” school, and this evidence will be discussed at more length below. But even if one were to doubt that particular division, it is possible to draw a more general conclusion.

The Inner Chapters have traditionally been assumed to have been largely from the hand of Zhuang Zhou or from his immediate disciples, and hence have often been considered to have had unusually great authority as representing the “real” *Zhuangzi*. Recently, however, scholars have raised serious questions about this narrative. In perhaps the most extensive analysis of the question, Esther Klein has marshalled considerable evidence to suggest that many of the traditional reasons for considering its early provenance are unreliable. (Klein 2011) Moreover, she makes an interesting extended argument that there is no evidence that Sima Qian had read or even knew of the Inner Chapters, suggesting that they did not exist in their current form until at least the first century BCE.

Despite Klein’s interesting argument, I tend to believe in a traditional early dating of the Inner Chapters. The “Qi Wu Lun” 齊物論 is clearly in direct dialogue with Gongsun Long’s reworking of later Mohist logic, and the frequent fictional associations of Zhuang Zhou with Hui Shi across different strata of material suggest common knowledge that Zhuang Zhou was personally engaged with the Logicians. Moreover, patterns of textual similarity and linkages across the Inner Chapters, identified by Liu Xiaogan and not refuted by Klein, suggest that the whole section may have a relatively unified provenance.

Although not primarily aimed at proving the priority of the Inner Chapters, the current study has found that they can also be distinguished from the rest of the *Zhuangzi* corpus by their relation to Laozi: intertexts are fewer and of a different character. This might reasonably be interpreted as evidence for a late and less-Laoist origin of the section, if one assumes that Zhuang Zhou really was originally an

<sup>3</sup>The Mixed Chapters average 3.7 intertexts per chapter.



adherent of Laozi. The problem with this assumption is that available evidence suggests a growing association of *Zhuangzi* and Laozi over time: Sima Qian clearly groups them together as Daoists, and by the late Han, the Celestial Masters religion recognized them as part of the same pantheon.

An origin of the Inner Chapters from hands other than Zhuang Zhou or his immediate disciples certainly cannot be ruled out. However, the relative scarcity of Laozi intertexts in the Inner Chapters could paradoxically provide a coherent explanation for their early provenance. All that is required is to abandon the notion that Zhuang Zhou saw himself primarily as a disciple of Laozi. In this case, the growing number of intertexts in later materials from the Outer and Mixed Chapters would suggest a slowly-growing association of Lao Dan and Zhuang Zhou over the late Warring States and Western Han. In other words, this association may have simultaneously worked to create the idea of a “Daoist” school while also accreting texts to the *Zhuangzi* which provided examples of that linkage.

#### (ii) Priority of Wang Bi edition

Next, in almost every case, the text of the *Zhuangzi* is closest to the Wang Bi 王弼 version of the *Laozi*, rather than to the Heshanggong edition, or to the excavated texts from Guodian and Mawangdui. Each time a possible intertext was discovered upon initial review of the materials, all versions of the *Laozi* were compared. In each case where other versions diverged from the Wang Bi *Laozi*, but still contained the passage in question, those passages are also reproduced in the appendix: those interested can confirm that, while *Zhuangzi* texts do not always replicate the Wang Bi *Laozi* perfectly, they are significantly closer to that edition than to the other available texts. This conclusion is not particularly surprising: Guo Xiang 郭象, who compiled the standard version of the *Zhuangzi*, was an adherent of the same *xuanxue* philosophy that Wang Bi had founded, and would almost certainly have been working from the Wang Bi *Laozi* commentary in any instance when he needed to check or confirm quotations from that text. It is possible that the resulting similarities are partially the result of Guo Xiang’s work as an editor—it is entirely possible that he “corrected” obvious *Laozi* citations from Wang Bi’s edition. However, it should be noted that many of the intertexts are not direct quotations of the *Laozi*, and may not have been perceived by Guo Xiang as texts which required collation against the *Laozi*. If so, that suggests that the content of the *Zhuangzi* may have still been evolving in tandem with the version of the *Laozi* used by Wang Bi until a relatively late date—if not under the hands of Wang Bi, Guo Xiang, Xiang Xiu 向秀 or other *xuanxue* 玄學 adherents, then perhaps through other unknown transmitters in the Han.

#### (iii) Links to the *Xunzi* and *Hanfeizi*

Finally, digital comparison of these texts with other pre-Qin works revealed a surprising number of linkages to the *Xunzi* and the *Hanfeizi*: a large proportion of intertexts shared between the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* were also replicated in those two texts, but in no other pre-Qin text. Although there has long been a line of argument suggesting Laoist influence on the *Xunzi*, and of course the *Hanfeizi* has two

chapters devoted to exegesis of the *Laozi*, this intertextual evidence suggests a more complex pattern of influence and/or textual transference. Texts in the appendix which also have relevant examples from the *Xunzi* and *Hanfeizi* are marked, and possible relations with the two texts are discussed at the end of this paper.

### 3 Review of Intertextual Evidence, by Category

Here, then, is a review of the four types of intertexts discussed above: similar grammatical structures, keywords, phrasal borrowings, and direct quotations:

#### 1. Echoes of vocabulary or grammatical structure

Examples of intertexts which fall into this first category should not be given too much weight. Multiple users of any language can repeat each other's words verbatim simply due to unremarkable coincidences guided by the natural structures of the language. And it is possible that, if we possessed a much larger corpus of pre-Qin writings than we do, some phrases which seem particular to the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* would be replicated many times over elsewhere in that hypothetically-larger data set. Nonetheless, so long as individual examples are not given undue weight, it is proper to consider echoes of language as indicating general influence, because it is easy enough to identify models in which replicated language indicates affinity.

In the case of this category of Lao-Zhuang intertexts, we certainly can find suggestive examples of how such language might propagate. For example, the simple question, "Who knows the reason?" (*shu zhi qi gu* 孰知其故) is in one respect a very basic phrase, and a direct artefact of basic Chinese grammar, which must have been used frequently in speech and writing, despite the fact that it does not appear in any other pre-Qin texts. However, one can also note how such a simple question has very deep resonances with the epistemological skepticism that is such a basic component of the orientation of both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, in a way that does really set them apart from other period philosophies. One could say the same of the phrase, "How much lies between them?" (*xiang qu ji he* 相去幾何) Perhaps this was a question often asked by pre-Qin travelers about the roads they were to travel; but only a Daoist could ask the question about conceptual categories such as "yes" and "no", or "life" and "death", as appears in the passages for this intertext. Not all examples from this category have such an obvious and direct connection to the basic philosophical orientation of these texts, but they also do not seem to be random: certain ways of talking about certain issues seem to have encouraged the reproduction of rhetorical structures.

Precisely because these intertexts are not obvious direct citations of famous quotes, they suggest that the influence of the *Laozi* may have been assimilated on an unconscious level by Zhuang Zhou, his immediate disciples, or later contributors to the *Zhuangzi*. It has long been understood that the gnomic verse structure of the *Laozi* suggests potential oral transmission, even if this view is far from universally accepted. Though it is impossible to prove the existence or persistence of such

transmission, it would certainly be consonant with a real Daoist technical rhetoric: the better that later writers had learned, perhaps memorized the text of the *Laozi*, the more likely that even its chance turns of phrase would be reproduced in new compositions.

## 2. Keywords

In this class one can categorize all words (generally, two-character compounds or phrases) which have a significance directly related to the philosophical context of the places they appear in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, and which are not used in other early texts. Calling them “keywords” should not imply that in every instance these words are central to the philosophy of the *Laozi* or the *Zhuangzi*, merely that they are significant to the immediate context in which they appear, and seem to be a term limited in use to these texts.

Among such cases of limited extent there seem to be three rough kinds. The first is simply unusual vocabulary words, such as “roiling” (*dun dun* 沌沌), “placid” (*tian dan* 恬淡), or “limpid” (*chun chun* 淳淳). These are the kind of words one would not be surprised to find used in Daoist writings, given the themes of these texts, but which do not seem to be carriers of any particular stress. After this, there are invocations of specific metaphors: “autumn tips” (*hao mo* 毫末), “straw dogs” (*chu gou* 芻狗), “the great sacrifice” (*tai lao* 太牢), “the great vessel” (*da qi* 大器). With the exception of “autumn tips”, which is referenced repeatedly in the “Autumn Waters” (*qiu shui* 秋水) chapter, none of these are given particular stress; and moreover, they are not explained, but are used in the process of making other points—suggesting an assumed readership already familiar with the terms. Finally, there are terms which are clearly used as something like secondary technical vocabulary: “existence and nonexistence” (*you wu* 有無), “good governance” (*shan zhi* 善治), “waterlike”/“sealike” (*ruo shui* 若水/*ruo hai* 若海), “the Great Way” (*da dao* 大道), “the Great Disputation” (*da bian* 大辯), “The Way hides” (*dao yin* 道隱), etc. Although such terms are used throughout the *Zhuangzi*, it is noteworthy that there are several instances taken from the “Discourse on Making Things Equal” (*qi wu lun* 齊物論). If one should take the Inner Chapters as representing the earliest stratum of the *Zhuangzi*, this would demonstrate that influence from the *Laozi* was at least present in a limited sense. In that case, it would seem to have provided a certain set of vocabulary, and a given set of concerns to go along with them, which were then appropriated and extended in new directions by Zhuang Zhou or his immediate disciples. Of course, if one does not assume the priority of the Inner Chapters, the same evidence could be read to suggest a further distance of the section from the *Laozi* than other portions of the received work, given that such keyword continuity is less explicit than outright quotations.

Of keywords cited more frequently, there are only two main sets. The lesser of these are the references to five types of each sense-object which are harmful, as per *Laozi* 12, “The five colors make man’s eyes blind;/ The five notes make his ears deaf;/ The five tastes injure his palate.” (Lau 1963: 68) This formula is adapted five times in the text of the *Zhuangzi*: four times in the Outer Chapters and once in the Mixed Chapters. It makes sense that no such reference is to be found in the Inner

Chapters, whose philosophy may be somewhat contemptuous of average social life, but is not generally ascetic. It seems that the ascetic strain of the *Laozi* may have been added to the *Zhuangzi* corpus through the preferences of one particular school.<sup>4</sup>

Far and away the most important keyword, replicated throughout the *Zhuangzi*, is “non-action” (*wu wei* 無為). It would not be an exaggeration to say that the centrality of non-action must thus be considered the lynchpin which holds together the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. And surely this fact will not surprise any habitual reader of either text—or anyone even casually acquainted with Chinese philosophy. To this extent, we can confirm conventional narratives of the history of philosophy. Nonetheless, an interesting picture emerges when one probes these intertexts.

The most glaring difference is that the term is used toward different ends in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. In the former text, it is usually used as a prescription for governing: the sage king takes no action, and the world governs itself. There are some ambiguous uses, but none which make non-action a clearly private virtue. In contrast, the *Zhuangzi* discusses non-action as both a virtue of governance, and a private attitude toward living in the world, with a frequency bias toward the latter. In the majority of examples, it is presented as a private means of living one’s life that will maximize contentment; or else as a property of the Way itself. The bias in favor of apolitical uses of *wu wei* is not so pronounced that it is sufficient to suggest a *Zhuangzi* entirely unconcerned with kingship. Moreover, there are some dialogues between ruling figures that seem to value the principle of non-action, even when the phrase *wu wei* is not used (for example, the dialogue between Yao and Shun in the “Discourse on Making Things Equal”). But it is still worthwhile to stress that the notion of “non-action”, which is clearly the most common intertextual tie binding the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, is also clearly something which distinguishes the texts as much as it unites them: it is a phrase that has taken on a broader set of meanings. It is therefore not sufficient evidence upon which one could claim that Zhuang Zhou thought of himself as a simple transmitter of Lao Dan.

However, more political usages of “non-action” are common in other early texts.<sup>5</sup> The first such usage is not in the *Laozi*, but in the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘One who acts not and governs, could Shun be as such?’” (子曰, 無為而治者, 其舜也與) Later, there were several such usages in Legalist writings—and this fact has been one of the main arguments in favor of counting Legalism as an intellectual descendent of Laoist thinking. To the extent that is true, the different evolution of the *Zhuangzi* could be read as a forking off in intellectual history from the political possibilities inherent in the *Laozi*. Just as the Legalists adapted the concept of “non-action” to mean something like “no personal interference by the ruler in the

<sup>4</sup>Notably, several (but not all) of these references are by those Graham labels as Primitivist (Graham 1989: 173).

<sup>5</sup>In fact, the common occurrence of “non-action” in other pre-Qin texts required a methodological exception to have this term “count” in the present study; this was the lone exception so made. The justification is simply that it seemed impossible to discuss Lao-Zhuang relations without discussing this central term.

established legal mechanisms of the state”, Zhuang Zhou and his followers performed no less of an adaptation to the same term.

### 3. Phrasal borrowings

These examples, which we might call “standard intertexts”, are all more obviously definitive examples of specific lines of influence than those texts listed in the first two categories. Texts in this category are quite distinctive, clearly irreducible to grammatical artefacts. Even in these cases, one cannot necessarily prove direct copying of the *Laozi*: it is possible to speculate about the existence of now-lost intermediary texts which received influence from the *Laozi* and passed it on to the *Zhuangzi*. But the likelihood of this being a major factor in the composition of the *Zhuangzi* is low, because the fame and influence of the *Laozi* was high, and would have presumably been the most obvious source for such phrasal borrowings.

There are two main types of phrasal borrowings represented in the discovered texts: those which have a metaphorical force or are otherwise presenting a striking image, and those which seem to be important explanations of philosophical position.

Among the former type, the primary mechanism of transmission seems to be the power of an arresting image or turn of phrase, from a supremely influential text, working its way into the expression of a later writer. Often the phrase in question is not given particular stress. For example, “a lord of ten thousand chariots” (萬乘之主) is simply deployed as an artful way of saying, “a powerful ruler”—as it is then used later in the tradition, to the point of cliché. And the fact that the image may be more important than the content in such cases is clear from the example of “they walk on land without meeting rhinoceros or tiger,” (陸行不遇兕虎) from *Laozi* 50, which is transformed to “they walk on land without avoiding rhinoceros or tiger” (陸行不避虎者)—the first describing a man of quasi-magical harmony with the Way, the second describing ethical fearlessness in a corrupted society. Such cases demonstrate again the way in which the *Laozi* is familiar to the point of being a sort of spontaneous generator of rhetoric for some of those who composed the *Zhuangzi*.

However, the examples of phrasal borrowings which actually are directly related to doctrine are much more numerous, as well as being more important. This type of borrowing touches on several different aspects of the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*: the nature of the Way (道之為物, 道常無名, 禮者道之華), the status of language and dialectic (異名同實, 不言之教, 知者不言), non-action as a substitute for ethics (聖人處物不傷物, 欲復歸根, 人之所畏), and a promotion of simplicity in governance (國家混亂, 絕聖棄智, 少私而寡欲). Although this is a fairly broad representation of what we might normally associate with a Zhuangzian worldview, it should be stressed that there are only three examples from the Inner Chapters of phrasal borrowing: “prior to the birth of Heaven and Earth” (先天地生), in *Laozi* 25 and the “The Great Master” (*Dazongshi* 大宗師); chapter of the *Zhuangzi*; “the teaching without words” (不言之教), repeated from *Laozi* 2 and 43 to two instances in “Discourse on Making Things Equal” and “The Sign of Virtue Complete”; and “no one knows the limit” (莫知其極), altered from a political context in *Laozi* 59 to an ethico-cosmological one, again in “The Great Master”. The two usages in “The Great Master” both show general influence of a kind of cosmological feeling from

the *Laozi*, but are not specific enough to be considered central to any philosophical position. The notion of the “unspeaking teaching”, however, is very much central, especially in the “Discourse on Making Things Equal”. This suggests that, along with the altered concept of “non-action” discussed in the keywords section above, the suspicious attitude toward language evinced in the *Laozi* was the only other major and certain influence from that work on whomever compiled the Inner Chapters. Much fuller influence from the *Laozi* consistent with the numerous echoes and invocations of that text which appear in the Outer and Mixed Chapters touches on many more subjects; if the Inner Chapters were actually prior, this suggests a retrospective association of Lao Dan with Zhuang Zhou, which would have naturally encouraged the further incorporation of Laoist references into circulated texts of the *Zhuangzi*.

#### 4. Direct quotes

In the final category one can place all intertexts which are clearly presented as citations of someone else’s words. This includes actually attributed quotes marked with “[X] said” ([某]曰); some of these are attributed to Lao Dan in quotations which may or may not actually reproduce the full text of received versions of the *Laozi*, while others may be actually reproducing text from the *Laozi* but attributing it to another figure. Also included are non-attributed sayings, introduced by the phrase “this is what is called” (*shi wei* 是謂); the implication of such examples is that there is a community of readers who already is familiar with the phrase in question, and that what the text is offering is a philosophical gloss upon that common saying.

When one examines these examples in detail, one finds again that there are zero such examples from the Inner Chapters. Those Inner Chapters do of course have plenty of examples of real or fictional characters being quoted, but none of what they are actually represented as saying comes from the text of the *Laozi*. Once more, this accentuates the impression that the *Laozi* may have been influential upon the compilers of the Inner Chapters without being seen as a canonical reference of central import. One could of course argue (as many have) that the Inner Chapters are largely consonant with the thought of Laozi, even if intertexts are relatively few. For reasons outlined at the beginning of this essay, I believe that assertions of the similarity of thought, in the absence of common sections of text, are difficult to prove because they rest on subjective judgments. However, even if one were to grant that the composers of the Inner Chapters intended to transmit Laozi’s thought without deviation, it would still be worth asking why intertexts are much fewer here than in the remainder of the work.

Of the examples which are present, most are single quotations of a given passage, suggesting idiosyncratic usage by one or another author. There are only three passages which are cited more than once. The most popular is “Do nothing, and nothing will be undone” (無為而無不為), of course a famous passage which may still occasionally be referenced in contemporary writing; this is quoted (in varying forms) four times in the *Zhuangzi*. Following this, there are two passages which are each used three times: “objects change of themselves” (物[將]自化) and “the



greatest honor is without honor” (至譽無譽).<sup>6</sup> What this suggests is that the most famous, citation-worthy parts of the *Laozi* were primarily those referencing the character of the Way and its relation to ethical behavior: one does not strive, and things change of themselves. This is obviously one of the most important themes of the *Laozi*, but it is hardly the only important theme—the more noteworthy social and political doctrines are absent. This is especially obvious from observing usages of the phrase, “self-changing” (*zi hua* 自化): the *Laozi* does have examples of this phrase being used to describe the self-improving state of the people under an inactive ruler, but these are not quoted in the *Zhuangzi*.

Considering all of this intertextual evidence as a whole, one can see certain broad themes emerge:

1. The *Laozi* certainly was very well-known to writers involved in the production of the *Zhuangzi*, from the putatively-earliest Inner Chapters to the more-clearly later strata of that text. While individual possible intertexts may be doubted, there is a strong overall impression of echoes between these two texts, both in grammatical structures, rhetorical flourishes, unusual vocabulary choices, and striking metaphors. Even when these texts are not central to the main idea, or even particularly meaningful in themselves, they do seem to show deep familiarity, to the point of possibly unconscious repetition, if not accidental cross-pollination of texts during transmission.
2. Significant, philosophical influence of the *Laozi* upon the *Zhuangzi* is present throughout the latter text, but it is weaker in the Inner Chapters than the Outer Chapters (and to some extent the Mixed Chapters as well). To the extent that there are clear influences from the *Laozi* upon the Inner Chapters, these are downplayed rather than foregrounded: there are no direct quotes employed, and intertexts which do exist there are not treated as references to authoritative dicta. One cannot conclude from the examples present that the *Zhuangzi* is trying to declare philosophical affinity to something called “Daoism”—a term of course well-known to first appear in Sima Tan’s “Discourse on the Essentials of the Six Schools” 論六家要旨.
3. The themes which the *Zhuangzi* does appropriate from the *Laozi* are a very partial selection of the positions which the earlier text stakes out. Far and away the greatest linkage is through the term, “non-action”, but from a mostly-political admonition in the *Laozi*, it is transformed into an ethic with both personal and political implications in the *Zhuangzi*, with a slight bias toward the personal. There are few clear political intertexts in the work (although borrowing of political ideals apart from intertexts is very possible), especially in the Inner Chapters. Instead, the most prominent themes represented in the Inner Chapter intertexts are cosmological considerations of the nature of the Way and its relation to non-action, and suspicion of language due to its propensity to create artificial divisions. A broader range of themes are represented in the Outer and Mixed

<sup>6</sup>This final case in fact has only one true quotation, and two other related intertexts not presented as quotations.



Chapters, but some of the most-frequently referenced language, such as admonitions against the “five colors”, “five notes”, and “five tastes” seem to be the result of particular interest of individual *Laozi*-influenced schools whose writings were later amalgamated to the *Zhuangzi*.

What these lessons suggest is that, for Zhuang Zhou or his immediate disciples, the *Laozi* was an important text which suggested a set of limited but important ideas: that there is a quasi-mysterious Way, that this Way acts by non-action, and that language has a tendency to impose artificial distinctions which could distract from these truths. These ideas are incredibly important in both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, and their commonality to both texts is no doubt why some readers might think of them as the core of early Daoism—if we assume that “early Daoism” is not simply a tautological way of naming these commonalities. In fact, it is important to remember that the *Laozi* has other central themes (the ineffability of *dao*, non-action as a precept for governance, evolutionary models of social change) that are not stressed in the Inner Chapters. Likewise, the Inner Chapters have other central themes (life as a process of transformation, the importance of nature and natural behavior, and perspectival relativism) that are not clearly voiced in the *Laozi*. Therefore, it might be proper to say that the earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi* were strongly influenced by the *Laozi*, but not to the point of constituting a school nameable as “Daoism”.

The transformation of the *Zhuangzi* into the second text of Daoism seems to have happened during the compilation of the Outer and Mixed Chapters. If the Inner Chapters were indeed the earliest stratum of the text, the most plausible explanation for this discrepancy is that Zhuang Zhou at some point became identified as a late follower of Lao Dan, based upon the real influences that were present in the Inner Chapters. This identification would then have attracted a much broader incorporation of *Laozi* intertexts into the *Zhuangzi*, on a wider assortment of themes. This narrative comports with common assessments of the later incorporation of various writings into the text of the *Zhuangzi*; the very fact that these have been named “Outer” and “Mixed” chapters since Guo Xiang’s recension reminds us that this has been a common narrative since the early medieval period. However, there is one subtle shift in emphasis which we should take away from this intertextual analysis. Usually, the division of the *Zhuangzi* into “authentic” and “inauthentic” materials has presupposed that Zhuang Zhou and his immediate school were true Daoist followers of Lao Dan, and that later additions from Yang Zhu, or yin-yang theorists served to muddy up this Daoism with extraneous issues. An intertextual view does not require one to label such later additions as actually being authentic Daoism, but it does suggest that they were caused by the growing sense that there was an “authentic Daoism” in the *Zhuangzi* which deserved supplementation. Those later materials may be considered more Daoist than those of Zhuang Zhou not because they are actually more faithful to the *Laozi*, but because they are more conspicuously trying to be faithful to the *Laozi*, as understood by one or another school.

## 4 Representations of Lao Dan and Zhuang Zhou

Having considered available intertextual evidence, it is possible more profitably to examine representations of Lao Dan and Zhuang Zhou, both in the text of the *Zhuangzi* and elsewhere. Doing so will provide a more complete picture of how the actual patterns influence as seen in the intertexts were understood at various points during the compilation and circulation of the *Zhuangzi*.

Lao Dan appears three times in the Inner Chapters. In the first example, in “The Lord of Caring for Life”, he is simply a dead body and an occasion for remarks on natural transformations of things. In “The Sign of Virtue’s Fullness”, he is speaking with a mutilated man, “Toeless Shushan” who has just come away disappointed from an encounter with a rude Confucius. Lao Dan explains how he should have dealt with him: “Why not straightout cause him to take life and death as one stick, and acceptable and unacceptable as one roll? Would it be acceptable to loosen his bonds?” (“胡不直使彼以死生為一條，以可不可為一貫者，解其桎梏，其可乎?”) Such sentiments are not radically alien to the *Laozi*; the suspicion of binary pairs is very much an integral part of that text’s critique of language. However, the two pairs life/death and acceptable/unacceptable are not among the distinctions that the *Laozi* deconstructs; instead, they are very much important themes to which the *Zhuangzi* returns repeatedly. The questioning of the difference between life and death is integral to the *Zhuangzi*’s focus on transformation as a positive natural force, and the denial of difference between the acceptable and unacceptable is at the center of the rebuttal of the Logicians which occupies much of “The Discourse on Making Things Equal”. Clearly, what has happened here is that the writers of the Inner Chapters have used a fictional Lao Dan to address a quasi-Laoist topic, but one in which their own concerns are subtly substituted for those of the *Laozi*.

A similar pattern can be found in the third example, a dialogue in the “Answering to Lords and Kings”, between YANG Ziju 陽子居 and Laozi which seems at first blush to contradict the apolitical character of the intertextual evidence presented above. Yang asks about the character of a bright king, and is told, “In the rule of a bright king, his achievements will cover the world but seem not to be from himself, they will transform all things but the people will not rely upon him, there will be no one to seek preferment, he will cause objects to be glad of themselves, he will stand upon the unfathomable, and he will be one to roam in non-existence.” (“明王之治，功蓋天下而似不自己，化貸萬物而民弗恃，有莫舉名，使物自喜，立乎不測，而遊於無有者也。”) Although this does not use any verifiable intertext from the *Laozi*, it certainly is referencing the political version of non-action that dominates that text, otherwise absent from the Inner Chapters. However, the context of the chapter works to subvert such a reading: it is primarily composed of ironic visions of kingship, in which non-action is not being prescribed for actual governance, but being used to show up questions of governance as being subsidiary to ultimate concerns. Given that, the statement that the bright king “roams in non-existence” may not be a mystical statement of the sage-ruler’s cosmological transcendence, but rather a witticism. There are no bright kings: and because they don’t exist, the world

goes on happily enough without them. At the very least, we do have much more Zhuangzian turns of phrase (Lao Dan does not “roam”!) being put into the mouth of the earlier figure.

In the Outer and Mixed Chapters, there are sixteen places in which Lao Dan is a character in various dialogues.<sup>7</sup> Of these sixteen, eleven are encounters between Lao Dan and Confucius. The topics are varied, and there are a few cases in which the words attributed to Lao Dan contain (at least in part) direct quotations of the *Laozi*. For the most part, however, one can see the same pattern as in the Inner Chapters: Lao Dan is almost always treated as an authority figure, and usually the speeches which are put into his mouth do not contradict the positions of the *Laozi*, although they do use different vocabulary and have different emphases. In some cases, the interpolated positions and rhetoric may be closely tied to those of the Inner Chapters, for example in the “Heaven and Earth” chapter:

Confucius said to Lao Dan, “There are those who manage the way as if turning their back on it, making acceptable the unacceptable, and making so the not-so. Rhetoricians have a saying, ‘Distinguishing hard and white is like distinguishing space and time’. As for this, could one call such people sages?” Lao Dan said, “Such is a petty official or a drudge, one who belabors his body and stresses his mind...Governance is among people. One who forgets it in objects, forgets it in heaven, his name is the ‘self-forgetter’. A person who forgets himself, he can be called one who enters into heaven.”

夫子問於老聃曰：「有人治道若相放，可不可，然不然。辯者有言曰：『離堅白，若縣宇。』若是則可謂聖人乎？」老聃曰：「是胥易技係，勞形怵心者也...有治在人。忘乎物，忘乎天，其名為忘己。忘己之人，是之謂入於天。」

Confucius’ question is obviously drawn straight from the “Discourse on Making Things Equal” and in particular from that book’s attack on Gongsun Long. And the first part of Lao Dan’s response, while unrelated to any text in the *Laozi*, is drawn directly from Lao Dan’s response to Yang Ziju in the “Answering to Lords and Kings” passage discussed above; similarly, the stress on “heaven” (rather than on the Way) is a typically Zhuangzian marker.

Other appearances of Lao Dan in the Outer and Mixed Chapters have a more distinctive cast. For example, there is a series of encounters between Confucius and Lao Dan in “The Turning of Heaven” in which Lao Dan first echoes several passages from the Inner Chapters, and then starts discussing the fall of the sage kings and the rise of Confucianism and Mohism, and finally ends by discussing different patterns of fertilization in the animal kingdom. Lao Dan again draws philosophical lessons from zoology in the “Tian Zifang” and “Knowledge Wandered North” chapters—by discussing the life-cycles of actual animals, rather than using the occasional animal allegorically, these are quite different in treatment than anything that occurs in the Inner Chapters.

It is hard to draw a firm contrast between the appearances of Lao Dan in the Inner Chapters, as opposed to those in the Outer and Mixed Chapters. All seem to acknowledge Lao Dan as an authority, few use the text of the *Laozi* even in part, and all either adapt Laoist concerns to Zhuangist ones, or simply put new kinds of

<sup>7</sup>This total includes the one dialogue in “External Objects” attributed to “Lao Lai” (老萊子).

rhetoric in his mouth. Difference here is not of kind, but of degree: not all of the Outer and Mixed Chapters care about Lao Dan, but in some there are repeated invocations of him, sometimes much longer than those which appear in the Inner Chapters, and often more thematically and rhetorically different from anything to be found in the *Laozi*. This is consistent with the picture of Laoist influence which emerged from consideration of the intertextual evidence, of a real but more tenuous relationship between the *Laozi* and the Inner Chapters.

The one such narrative which is actually built into the *Zhuangzi*, in the final chapter, is a good example of how the vision of Laozi had been distorted by Zhuangist readers:

Taking the root as the essence, and objects as coarse, and plenty as insufficiency, placid and solitary, dwelling with divine brightness, the ancient methods of the Way lay in such things. Gatekeeper Yin and Lao Dan heard such tidings and delighted in them, establishing them with constant non-being, ruling them with the Supreme Unity, taking weakness and humility as their appearance, and emptiness and non-destruction of all things as their substance.

以本為精，以物為粗，以有積為不足，澹然獨與神明居，古之道術有在於是者。關尹、老聃聞其風而悅之。建之以常無有，主之以太一，以濡弱謙下為表，以空虛不毀萬物為實。

Watson notes here that “The other sayings attributed here to Laozi agree in thought and terminology with the *Daodejing*”, (Watson 2013: 295) but that is not quite correct. Terms like “root” and “non-existence” are used in the *Laozi*, but “divine brightness”, “supreme oneness” and even “emptiness” only appear in the *Zhuangzi*, and the suspicion of matter implied by a phrase such as “taking objects as coarse” is only implied by limited sections of the *Zhuangzi*. Clearly, by the late period of composition of the “Under Heaven” chapter, the process of canon-formation of the *Zhuangzi* had changed how the *Laozi* was read.

Something similar, if rather more subtle, can be seen in the biographies of Lao Dan, Zhuang Zhou, and HAN Fei 韓非 which are grouped together in the *Records of the Historian*, on account of their “all having their source in the meaning of the Way and virtue” (皆原於道德之意). After a basic introduction of Laozi, SIMA Qian 司馬遷 immediately describes an encounter between him and Confucius. That passage does not appear in the *Zhuangzi* or any other current texts (although it does, oddly, portray Lao Dan as citing one line from the *Record of Rites*). However, it is strongly reminiscent of the other fictional citations of Lao Dan which are recorded in the *Zhuangzi*. “Get rid of your proud airs and many desires, your bearing and corrupt ambitions, these all have no benefit for your body.” (去子之驕氣與多欲，態色與淫志，是皆無益於子之身。) The phrasing here is consistent with Huang-Lao understandings of *Laozi*, and the anecdote as a whole reads much like similar examples in the *Zhuangzi*, and it seems very likely that this passage may have originally been represented in *Zhuangzi* materials which were later culled by Guo Xiang. There has, of course, been considerable speculation on SIMA Tan’s 司馬談 adherence to Huang-Lao, and how this may have shaped the final version of the *Records of the Historian*. Disentangling how this issue relates to the text of the *Zhuangzi* would be a subject for a more focused essay, but it is possible at least to suggest that the biographies in this section are the result of the same forces shaping the depiction of a canonical “Laozi” within the text of the *Zhuangzi*.

## 5 The Lao-Zhuang Connection and Other Early Texts

If, as seems likely from the above arguments, the earlier strata of the *Zhuangzi* were influenced by the *Laozi* without being devoted to it, we ought to consider the issue of Laoist influence in the broader textual environment during the Warring States and Han. It is not necessarily the case that there are other texts more influential on the composition of the *Zhuangzi* than the *Laozi*, but there are certainly other competing influences and intertextual relationships. And the character of some of those other relationships may well be influenced by the *Laozi* intertexts (and vice-versa). Intertextuality is a complex system of relations which takes place in a larger contextual field, each choice of connection or invocation making meaningful those options not chosen. As in Indra's net, each ligature is a potential opportunity to view the whole system in miniature.

Of course, connections between the *Zhuangzi* and any other early text are complex enough in themselves, and reach far beyond the scope of this paper. What follows does not pretend to be anything but a brief précis of a few issues important to consider in regard to how the Lao-Zhuang connection might affect our understanding of other early texts. Much more work is necessary—not just in the traditional canonical texts which are represented here, but with excavated texts, particularly Huang-Lao works such as the *Taiyi Sheng Shui* 太一生水 or the lesser-known *Hengxian* 恒先, in which Yu Qiang has demonstrated several points of contact with both the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. (Qiang 2009) However, work on such a scale would call for a full monograph. Given the necessary brevity of this section, it is hoped only that it will be possible to gain some rough idea of how Laoist influence may have shaped and been shaped by the other texts with which the authors of the *Zhuangzi* interacted.

### 1. Laoist influence and the Logicians

If one were to try to define an alternate “greatest influence” on the *Zhuangzi* other than the *Laozi*, the most obvious candidate would be the work of the “Logicians”, Gongsun Long and Hui Shi.<sup>8</sup> Hui Shi appears in dialogue with Zhuang Zhou in two long passages in the Inner Chapters clearly more substantial than the Inner Chapter references to Lao Dan. HUI SHI 惠施 and GONGSUN LONG 公孫龍 appear several more times in the Outer and Mixed Chapters. The intellectual history which occupies most of the final chapter of the book ends with these two, rather than with Zhuang Zhou. And the “Discourse on Making Things Equal”, generally thought to be the text most likely to be from the hand of Zhuang Zhou, can almost be considered an extended engagement with the theories of the Logicians: its crazed language style is directly derived from the arguments one can see attributed to Hui

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<sup>8</sup>Steve Coutinho has made a persuasive case that the argument of the “Discussion on Making Things Equal” is a strong counter to Later Mohist argument, in favor of philosophical vagueness. (Coutinho 2004) Nonetheless, I will restrict my discussion here to the text's engagement with Hui Shi and Gongsun Long, because the intertextual links to those two thinkers are more explicit.

Shi in the “Under Heaven” chapter, as well as to the small parts of the *Gongsun Longzi* still extant.

What makes the *Laozi* still perhaps a more “influential” text is the way that it is treated, in comparison with the Logicians. The latter are negatively influential: every time that Zhuang Zhou and Hui Shi are depicted together, they are arguing; and in fact the main theme of the “Discourse on Making Things Equal” is a critique of the Logicians’ use of categories. Most readers have assumed based on these texts that Hui Shi and Zhuang Zhou really were contemporaries who knew and debated each other. They may have been personal friends. But they do not in any way share the same philosophical position, even if they were interested in the same issues. Instead, when the *Laozi* is echoed in the Inner Chapters, it is often being used instrumentally, to critique the Logicians. Though infrequent, such echoes tend to repeat Laozi’s suspicions of language: the need to employ the “unspeaking teaching” (*bu yan zhi jiao* 不言之教) is a conclusion of the argument against the logicians, and the “Great Disputation” (*da bian* 大辯) is offered as an antidote to their less worthy disputations. This is likely why the fictional encounter between Confucius and Lao Dan cited in the previous section replays (in garbled form) this dispute over language: later writers seem to have understood that it was central to Zhuang Zhou’s interest in the *Laozi*.

If this is correct, then it suggests the very earliest importance of the *Laozi* to the *Zhuangzi* was as a canonical text being appropriated for limited use by Zhuang Zhou in one debate which he was engaged in with his contemporaries. Other, broader usages of the *Laozi* which appear in the Outer and Mixed Chapters would then likely not predate the Western Han.

## 2. *Laoist Influence and the Xunzi and Hanfeizi*

Many of the intertexts discussed in the first section of this paper can also be found in the *Xunzi*, the *Hanfeizi*, or both, but in no other pre-Qin text. The distribution is somewhat different, however. There are many grammatical formations and keywords from the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* which can also be found in the *Xunzi*, but almost no borrowings, and no direct quotes. On the other hand, intertexts of all kinds can be found in the *Hanfeizi*, but these are almost entirely to be found concentrated in the “Explaining Lao” (*jie lao* 解老) and “Figuring Lao” (*yu lao* 喻老) chapters. There does not seem to be any clear thematic pattern to the phrases which do appear in either the *Xunzi* or the *Hanfeizi*, although in context their discussions of Laozi (embryonic in the *Xunzi*, more extensive in the *Hanfeizi*) tend to reinforce stereotypical impressions of a Confucian or a Legalist position. There are also numerous *Laozi* intertexts (also of no discernable pattern) which appear in those two texts, but which are not represented in the extant *Zhuangzi* corpus.

By standard narratives of pre-Qin philosophy which focus on the development of schools, this set of intertextual linkages should be puzzling. *Xunzi* is a Confucian, Laozi and *Zhuangzi* are Daoists, and *Hanfeizi* is a Legalist. The connection to *Xunzi* is particularly odd: there is at least known Daoist influence on the Legalists, but the only direct reference of *Xunzi* to Laozi is a sharp critique: “Laozi had insight into the bent, but no insight into the straight.” 老子有見於詘[屈], 無見於信[伸].



Furthermore, the *Xunzi* also stakes out stances which appear to be just as opposed to *Zhuangzi* as to Laozi. Most noticeably, he remarked that *Zhuangzi* was “blinded by the Natural, and did not know the Human” 莊子蔽於天而不知人. Following soon after that direct critique of *Zhuangzi* by name, the text goes on to stress (in apparent direct opposition to *Zhuangzi*’s position) the importance of cognition and judgment to the Way.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in the “Rectifying Names” chapter, Xunzi discusses “transformation” in a way seemingly opposite to that of *Zhuangzi*, as a merely phenomenal and non-substantial change; given the importance of the concept to *Zhuangzi*, this may again be a deliberate distancing.<sup>10</sup> Because of such obvious points of distinction between Xunzi and the Daoists, it is not surprising that the possibility of intertextual linkages has been overlooked previously. For example, in his own large and helpful catalogue of pre-Qin *Laozi* intertexts, Chen Guying did not bother to look for any references in the *Xunzi*. However, direct critique of an earlier text does not mean that one has not been influenced by it. (Chen 2014) And as scholars in recent decades have begun to question the boundaries of such schools, it should not be a radical move to think about the relation between these texts without prior labels.

One possible link is geographical. The biography of Laozi in the *Records of the Historian* names him as a person of Chu, and even if one doubts that there was such a person, early *Laozi* texts did circulate there. The text has some linguistic similarities with the *Lyrics of Chu*, and of course the excavated texts from both Guodian and Mawangdui, though relatively late, suggest a regional canonization of those texts. A similar case could be made for the *Zhuangzi*: although Zhuang Zhou was identified as hailing from Meng in Sima Qian’s biography, the same text repeats as the sole anecdote borrowed from the *Zhuangzi* his refusal to serve the king of Chu; and the *Zhuangzi* itself shows repeated interest in Chu, in such well-known stories as the Madman of Chu, and Zhuang Zhou’s dream of the skull while on the road to Chu. By themselves, such references would hardly be enough to support a Chu origin, but strong intertextual links between the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi* (discussed below) also suggest the persistence of linked regional circulation.

Neither XUN Qing 荀卿 nor Han Fei were originally from Chu, or died there; but it seems that they both spent time there at a formative period. The *Records of the Historian* biography of Xun Qing says that he fled to Chu after being slandered at the Qi court, where he became the teacher of Li Si (also from Chu); the biography of Han Fei says that he was a student of Xun Qing at the same time as Li Si, so this also presumably happened in Chu. One could imagine a biography-centered narrative of how both Xun Qing and Han Fei were influenced by the texts of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* (in whatever state those were in during the third century) which they

<sup>9</sup>“the heart must know the Way, and only then will it approve of the Way. Only after it approves of the Way will it be able to keep to the Way and reject what is not the Way.” (Hutton 2014: 228) Nevertheless, possible influence from Laoist or Zhuangist thought may be attributed to the following assertion that knowledge comes through “emptiness” 虛.

<sup>10</sup>I am indebted to Kim-chong Chong for reminding me of the relevance of these portions of the *Xunzi*.



found circulating broadly in Chu. However, even if these biographies overstate a Chu connection, the same forces which created such a narrative could also have worked to shape the extant texts of the *Xunzi* and the *Hanfeizi*. For example, it is possible to imagine the “Explaining Lao” and “Figuring Lao” texts to have originally been independent commentaries which were at one point inserted into the *Hanfeizi* on the strength of such a regional association.

Dedicated studies would be required to decipher which relationship between these four texts would fit available evidence most closely. For present purposes it is simply possible to note that, however the texts did evolve in relation to each other, the *Zhuangzi*, *Xunzi*, and *Hanfeizi* all do explicitly refer to a figure identifiable as Laozi, and they seem to be invoking him to different ends. As mentioned above, the earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi* Inner Chapters are interested in the *Laozi* primarily for cosmological speculation on the Way, and for the anti-Logician potential of its conception of language. Obviously, the *Xunzi* and *Hanfeizi* both lean in different ways toward much more serious socio-political engagement, stances which seem to be reflected in the way they discuss Laozi. Thus, even without asserting the existence of Daoist or Legalist “schools” in the fourth to third centuries (assigning Xun Qing to a Confucian school seems more reasonable), the three thinkers or their immediate followers may have been deliberately using the *Laozi* in different ways, to stake out contradictory positions in the intellectual field.

### 3. Laoist Influence and the *Huainanzi*

It has never been a secret that the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and the *Huainanzi* have a pattern of intertextual relationships. Even though the *Huainanzi* is more properly thought of as Syncretist rather than Daoist, it seems to announce itself as Daoist from its opening chapter, “Originating in the Way” (原道訓). *Zhuangzi* is directly mentioned a few times in the *Huainanzi*; Laozi is mentioned and quoted frequently.

In fact, preliminary computer-assisted intertextual analysis of the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi* suggests that there are even stronger intertextual links between those two texts than between the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Moreover, those links are of a somewhat different character. Relatively few *Laozi-Zhuangzi* intertexts are also found in the *Huainanzi*; the exceptions are very prominent phrases such as “the unspeaking teaching” (*bu yan zhi jiao* 不言之教) or “non-action” (*wu wei* 無為). However, there are a number of long phrases from the *Zhuangzi* Outer and Mixed Chapters which can also be found in the *Huainanzi*, a fact which supports the theory that the extant *Zhuangzi* may have passed through the same editorial committee under Liu An that compiled the *Huainanzi*.

The reason why *Laozi-Zhuangzi* intertexts may not be appearing as often in the *Huainanzi* is that the latter text is simply more conscious of its sources. When the *Huainanzi* wants to cite the *Laozi*, it does cite—and attribute its citations to the correct text. Laozi and the *Laozi* are clearly authorities for that text in a way they weren’t in the *Zhuangzi* Inner Chapters—but, again, this manifests a similar pattern to the Outer and Mixed Chapters.

The axis of *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Huainanzi* may be one of the most substantial and complex topics for intertextual analysis of early Chinese texts. Because of that

complexity, it would be unwise to speculate too much on the details of that tripartite relationship here; more work in a dedicated study would be required to derive reliable conclusions as to specific lines of textual filiation and interplay. However, two general observations can at least be suggested in a preliminary way. First, because the *Huainanzi* is locatable in time and space, its patterns of intertextuality with the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* suggest that the court of Liu An may have been instrumental in defining the relationship of those two texts, and creating the greater Laoist influence on the Outer and Mixed Chapters than was present in the Inner Chapters. Second, the regional pride and cultural identification with an older Chu state which partially motivated the *Huainanzi*, as well as perhaps the collation of the *Lyrics of Chu*, may also have been instrumental in the promotion of both the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, and the editorial expansion of the latter.

## 6 Conclusion: Ordering the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*

All post-Han readings of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* would have taken the *Records of the Historian* biography of Lao Dan as a starting point for understanding the development of these texts. Lao Dan was apparently an older contemporary of Confucius; hence the *Laozi* presumably was composed by him in the sixth century. Meanwhile Zhuang Zhou is listed as a contemporary of King Hui of Liang and King Xuan of Qi, hence the *Zhuangzi* must have been composed in the late fourth century. Most modern interpreters take Zhuang Zhou's biography as more or less reliable, but Lao Dan's as a pure fiction, possibly adapted from the kind of Confucius-Lao Dan debates that are frequently narrated in the Outer and Mixed Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.

However, we have no other real biographical materials that attest to Lao Dan besides these anecdotal legends, and no evidence of the *Laozi* circulating before the turn of the third century. Despite a somewhat earlier terminus ante quem than Graham originally proposed, it is still a reasonable position to consider the *Laozi* a work later than or contemporary to the earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi*. Although in a note acknowledging one "suggestive" intertextual link, Graham suggests that this is not conclusive of influence of the *Laozi* upon the *Zhuangzi*. On the other hand, Liu Xiaogan makes a strong case that the verse form of the *Laozi* most resembles that of the *Classic of Poetry*, and that therefore a very early date is most likely, whether or not there was a historical Lao Dan.

Any one intertext is indeed inconclusive in isolation, especially brief phrases. However, when one can find multiple intertexts, as those presented above, the case becomes much stronger. Most of the intertexts in the Inner Chapters are vague echoes; this is circumstantial evidence, but there is a lot of it. Of course, the Outer and Mixed Chapters have many more intertexts, including direct quotes—influence there would not have been disputed by Graham, who attributed such sections to later Primitivists, Yangists, and Syncretists.

Even though the intertextual evidence presented above has pointed consistently toward greater influence of the *Laozi* upon the Outer and Mixed Chapters, and less

on the Inner Chapters, there are several points which suggest that the *Laozi* circulated in some form prior to Zhuang Zhou or his immediate disciples:

1. The most common intertext is “non-action” and longer phrases based on that compound. As mentioned above, the term is first used by Confucius in a political context. The *Laozi* uses it in largely political contexts, but with some ambiguity; while the *Zhuangzi* uses it in largely apolitical contexts, with some ambiguity. It makes more sense to assume that the term evolved simply from more-political to less-political usage, than that it was mentioned once politically, was then used commonly apolitically, and then was returned to political usage. This is especially the case given the quote about the ruler’s non-action attributed to Lao Dan in “The Sign of Virtue’s Fullness”: the vocabulary of such statements when they appear in the *Laozi* is much closer to the sole such statement in the *Analects*, than either is to the *Zhuangzi* Inner Chapters—it is much easier to assume that the *Zhuangzi* adapted that rhetoric from the *Laozi*, than that it was later “reclaimed” from the *Zhuangzi*.
2. Similar logic applies to the critique of language that is to be found in both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* Inner Chapters. Several intertexts are related to this theme, but in the *Zhuangzi* they are clearly tied to Zhuang Zhou’s historical debates with the Logicians. A specific focus of that critique in the *Laozi* is less clear. If the *Laozi* were borrowing such phrases from the *Zhuangzi*, it would be odd that the language could be kept while any references to the highly specific debate which occasioned them were edited out.
3. Intertexts shared with the *Xunzi* and *Hanfeizi* are easier to explain if one assumes an earlier *Laozi*. If there was some version of the *Laozi* in circulation by the beginning of the fourth century, then there is no difficulty in seeing how it could have been echoed in the *Zhuangzi* first, then in the *Xunzi* and *Hanfeizi*. It is rather harder to see how phraseology from a late fourth-century *Zhuangzi* would have a pervasive influence causing rhetorical echoes in those two latter texts. In particular, the *Laozi* exegesis in the *Hanfeizi* is hard to understand, if several passages could have been identified as being first circulated in the *Zhuangzi*.
4. When non-quote intertexts appear in multiple strata of the *Zhuangzi*, one has to begin imagining complex filiations in order for a post-*Zhuangzi* *Laozi* to make sense. The phrase “non-speaking teaching” (不言之教) is used in the *Laozi*, the Inner Chapters, and the Outer Chapters. In “Knowledge Wandered North” it is attributed to the Yellow Emperor, suggesting that the phrase must have migrated into Huang-Lao teaching. If the phrase originated in an early-date Inner Chapters, this would suggest either unusually quick forgetting of that fact, or an unusually late date for “Knowledge Wandered North”. Either is possible, but it is simpler to assume an early date for the *Laozi*.

All of these reasons are circumstantial evidence: there is too much that is still unknown about the evolution of various pre-Qin texts and patterns of thought. But they do all have a clear direction: it is easier and simpler to assume that some version of the *Laozi* really was prior to the *Zhuangzi* than the reverse case.

However, this is hardly evidence that the *Laozi* is actually a sixth century text, composed by the historical Lao Dan. It may be an early-fourth century text which began to circulate in unknown form shortly before Zhuang Zhou, and which had some influence on him; perhaps in that unknown earlier form it had greater influence than is now visible from a comparison with the received versions of the *Laozi*. In any case, it is relatively certain that the influence of the *Laozi* grew during the later materials incorporated into the Outer and Mixed Chapters, and that such influence was a part of the process that eventually tied Lao Dan and Zhuang Zhou together as the first “Daoists”.

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## Chapter 16

# The *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians: Two Perspectives on the Difference Between “*zhi* 指” and “*wu* 物”



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## 1 Introduction

The philosophical linkage between *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians (or the School of Names; “*mingjia* 名家”) is often overlooked in Chinese philosophy. Although some traditional Daoists and contemporary scholars have pointed out that there is a close relationship between *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians, not many systematic studies have been devoted to the difference and relation between the two philosophies. In this chapter, I argue that a significant part of *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy in the *Qiwulun* 齊物論 is devoted to responding to the Logicians’ discovery of the separation between the name that we use to refer to things (*zhi* 指) and the things that are referred to by name (*wu* 物).

The relation between *zhi* and *wu* is a central philosophical issue of the Logicians. Their doctrine can be represented by the opening sentence of the *Zhiwulun* 指物論 of Gongsun Long 公孫龍: “Of things, none are not designated [pointed], but designation [pointing] is not designated [pointed] 物莫非指,而指非指.” (*Zhiwulun*; Rieman 1980, p. 307)<sup>1</sup> This statement indicates that the Logicians were aware of the ontological difference between the “pointer” and the “pointed.” A core paragraph in *Zhuangzi*’s *Qiwulun* is obviously responding to this statement:

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<sup>1</sup>There is not an entire translation of the works of Gongsun Long. The textual base of all quotations of the *Gongsun Longzi* is (Wang 1992). I also compare (Pang 1979), (Huang 2012) and (Mei 2020) for paragraphing. The translation of this sentence, in particular, is taken from (Rieman 1980).

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To use a pointer (*zhi* 指) to show that pointers are not pointers is not as good as using a non-pointer to show that pointers are not pointers. To use a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to show that a horse is not a horse, Heaven and earth are one pointer; the ten thousand things are one horse. 以指喻指之非指,不若以非指喻指之非指也。以馬喻馬之非馬,不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也。天地,一指也;萬物,一馬也。(Zhuangzi 2; Watson 2013, p. 10)<sup>2</sup>

Most scholars believe that *Zhuangzi*'s claim here is only to express the objection to the Logicians' praise of logical debate.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation seems to echo *Zhuangzi*'s comment on Hui Shi 惠施, who "went on tirelessly separating and analyzing the ten thousand things, and in the end was known only for his skill in exposition."<sup>4</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 33; Watson 2013, p. 299) *Zhuangzi* thinks that "Hui Shi abused and dissipated his talents without ever really achieving anything! Chasing after the ten thousand things, never turning back, he was like one who tries to shout an echo into silence or to prove that form can outrun shadow. How sad!"<sup>5</sup> (Ibid.)<sup>6</sup> However, this interpretation does not explain why *Zhuangzi* gives a conclusive statement—"Heaven and earth are one pointer; the ten thousand things are one horse," after refuting the Logicians' claim. This reply shows that *Zhuangzi*'s concern is not only on the activity of debate and logical analysis itself but about how the relation of the pointer and the pointed should be conceived. More precisely, I will argue that this conclusion unveils *Zhuangzi*'s nuanced attitude towards the ontological difference between the designation and the designated; while the Logicians propose that a pure realm of ideas is the basis for designation, *Zhuangzi* proposes that the pre-linguistic realm of being is more fundamental. This divergence between *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians provides a good hermeneutical basis for reading the philosophy in the *Qiwulun*. In order to reach this conclusion, I will first examine how designation becomes a philosophical problem in ancient Chinese philosophy. After that, I will compare how *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians contemplate the problem.

<sup>2</sup>I have modified Watson's translation. Watson translates "*zhi*" as "attribute". I suggest translating "*zhi*" as "pointer" because the original meaning of "*zhi*" is the finger that points to something. The verb form of this word in every Chinese language is "to point." Therefore, "pointer" is a more appropriate translation. Moreover, as I will show later in this paper, *zhi* is not merely the attribute of things but what is used to refer to things. The word "pointer" is employed to emphasize the referring function of *zhi*.

<sup>3</sup>When comparing *Zhuangzi* and Gongsun Long, Thomas Ming and Aaron Lai for example focus on their different understandings of debate and logic (Ming and Lai 2016, pp. 271–289).

<sup>4</sup>散於萬物而不厭,卒以善辯為名。

<sup>5</sup>惠施之才,駘蕩而不得,逐萬物而不反,是窮響以聲,形與影競走也。悲夫!

<sup>6</sup>Another criticism of Hui Shi is that debates and logical analysis, according to *Zhuangzi*, is harmful to our body: "You, now—you treat your spirit like an outsider. You wear out your energy, leaning on a tree and moaning, slumping at your desk and dozing—Heaven picked out a body for you and you use it to gibber about 'hard' and 'white'! 今子外乎子之神,勞乎子之精,倚樹而吟,據槁梧而瞑。天選子之形,子以堅白鳴!" (*Zhuangzi* 5; Watson 2013, p. 41).



## 2 The Problematic of Designation

An apple is called “an apple”. A book is called “a book”. We use names to designate things in the world. This action looks so simple and unproblematic. However, how can a symbol, a sound, a graph, refer to something else? This is a philosophical question raised by many traditions of thought, including ancient Chinese philosophy. The problem of designation can be traced back to the problem of rectifying names (*zheng ming* 正名) in the Spring-and-Autumn Period. Kongzi 孔子 was asked by his disciple, Zi Lu 子路, what he would first consider if he is employed by the ruler of Wei to administer the state. Kongzi replies, “If I had to name my first action, I would rectify name 必也正名乎.” (*Analects* 13.3; Cf. Watson 2007, p. 88) The need of rectifying name implies that the correlation between the name and the named is not naively given. It is possible that the name fails to name what we meant to name. For example, according to Kongzi, a ruler cannot be called a ruler if he/she does not act according to the way of a ruler. This situation is possible because the name “ruler” can be used in two senses: on the one hand, it can be used to designate a particular person *x* who is called the ruler. On the other hand, it prescribes the qualities and duties of *x* being the ruler of the country. To put it in terms of semantics, a concept has its extension and intension; the extension is the objects being designated by the concept and the intension the meaning of the concept. Although Chinese philosophers did not use the term intension and extension, Kongzi’s advocacy of rectifying name shows that he is well aware of the distinction between what is meant and what is designated. This observation can be regarded as the beginning of the philosophy of language in ancient China.

Nevertheless, the discussion of the relation between name and object in the Spring-and-Autumn Period rests on the practical level. Kongzi’s concern is how to make people fulfil the responsibility associated with their name and social role. The name is rectified as long as people behave as they should according to their name. However, the philosophical ground of designating an object by a name is not yet questioned. This question is first formulated by the Logician Gongsun Long 公孫龍 in his famous piece *Baimalun* 白馬論 [Discourse on White Horse].

In the *Baimalun*, Gongsun Long defends a thesis that “a white horse is not a horse 白馬非馬”. This statement looks so counter sensical to our common sense as we would normally accept that all white horses are horse. There are hitherto many interpretations of the passage as well as explanations of why this statement is not as fallacious and non-sensical as it seems. The earliest notable explanation in contemporary scholarship is Fung Yu-lan’s Platonic explanation which proposes that single terms such as “horse” refer to the Platonic concept of “horse-hood.” (Fung 1948, 1991) Graham and Hansen defend the mass-noun and whole-part interpretation. (Graham 1986; Hansen 1983) They hold that “horse” is a mass noun which refers to the horse-stuff before individuation. Before entering into the ontological problem, an obvious fact is that Gongsun Long has discovered the difference between

designation and attribution.<sup>7</sup> This distinction can be seen in the first dialogue in the *Baimalun*, where Gongsun Long says:

The word ‘horse’ is used to attribute the form [of a horse]. The word ‘white’ is used to attribute the color [of the horse]. The word that attributes the form is different from the word that attributes the color. Therefore ‘white horse’ is not a ‘horse’ 馬者,所以命形也;白者,所以命色也。命色者非命形也。故曰白馬非馬。(Gongsun Longzi 2; Wang 1992, p. 42)

In this passage, Gongsun Long realizes that the term “horse” is not used to designate any particular horse in the world but only attributes the form of a horse. The form of a horse is the meaning of the word “horse” no matter whether the word is used to designate this horse or that horse. Similarly, the term “white” is used to attribute the color, but it does not designate any particular piece of white color. It is only with the compound term “white-horse” that we can refer to a real horse. Gongsun Long, hence, discovers the difference between “white” itself and the “white” as it appears in the compound term “white-horse”. According to Gongsun Long, the former is the “white which is not fixed at a position” and the latter is “the white which is fixed at a position”. He says, “‘White’ is the white which is not fixed at a position ... The ‘white’ in the term ‘white horse’ is the white which is fixed at a position. The white which is fixed at a position is not the ‘white’ itself 白者不定所白...白馬者,言白定所白也。定所白者,非白也。” (Gongsun Longzi 2; Wang 1992, p. 47)

This distinction between the “white which is fixed at a position” and the “white which is not fixed at a position” is more apparent in Gongsun Long’s *Jianbailun* 堅白論 [Discourse on Hardness and Whiteness]. In this text, Gongsun Long proposes that a piece of rock cannot be both hard and white at the same time because “when we look at the rock, we see that it is white but we cannot see the hardness, therefore it is not hard; when we touch the rock, we feel that it is hard but we cannot touch the whiteness, therefore it is not white.”<sup>8</sup> (Gongsun Longzi 5; Wang 1992, p. 78) On the one hand, Gongsun Long agrees that our sensual perception can directly grasp the attribute and property of the rock. On the other hand, he insists that the attribute or property is “hidden” [*cang* 藏] in the absence of sensual experience. This means that properties and attributes, such as “white” and “hard” can have two states of being. When I see that this rock is white, the “white” color is what I really see from this piece of rock. If I do not look at this rock, the “white” is hidden. The former

<sup>7</sup>In a recent paper, Ren and Liu argue that Gongsun Long’s aim was to challenge the nominalist view that “one thing may correspond to more than one name” as held by the Mohist and Xunzi. (Ren and Liu 2019, p. 472) They propose that Gongsun Long has defended a pro-realist one-name one-thing principle. (Ren and Liu 2019, p. 480) I agree with their interpretation that, according to Gongsun Long, the term “white” does not refer to any white horse. A theme of the *Baimalun* is hence based on a distinction between attributing a horse as white and designating a white horse. However, I disagree with Ren and Liu’s interpretation that “white” only refers to the white part of the white horse. This interpretation has over simplified the relation between “white fixed at a position” and “white not fixed at a position”, as I will examine shortly.

<sup>8</sup>視不得其所堅,而得其所白者,無堅也。拊不得其所白,而得其所堅。得其堅也,無白也。

corresponds to the “white which is fixed at a position” and the latter the “white which is not fixed at a position”.

This distinction shows that Gongsun Long does not understand the attribute “white” as a predicate. Fung Yiu Ming finds that a consistent way to interpret the *Baimalun* is to read the term “white” and “horse” not as a predicate of something but an individual object. He proposes that if “white horse” and “horse” are used as predicates to classify a class of being, then “white horse” is a proper subset of “horse”. This logically implies that all white horses are a horse. On the contrary, Gongsun Long’s argument is valid only if the term “white” and “horse” are not regarded as the predicate of a white horse but an individual object.<sup>9</sup> (Fung 2007, pp. 522–5) This implies that, according to Gongsun Long, a name or attribute can exist as an individual entity without designation to any real objects.

Fung Yiu Ming’s logical analysis has shown that the mass-noun interpretation of Gongsun Long is not favorable because “white” and “horse” are entities instead of mass stuff.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it may support Fung Yu-lan’s Platonic interpretation. According to Fung Yu-lan, the “white” and “horse” as single terms in Gongsun Long are “universal” in the Platonic sense. (Fung 1991, p. 289) An evidence for this interpretation is that Gongsun Long says, “horses necessarily have color. This is why there are white horses. If a horse does not have color. This is just the pure ‘horse’ as such. How can there be a white horse?” (*Gongsun Longzi* 2.8; Wang 1992: 43) This statement indicates that, according to Gongsun Long, the single term (“horse”) as an entity does not bear the physical properties of the corresponding physical object (the horse). In light of this, we may say that the “white which is not fixed at a position” corresponds to the pure concept of whiteness and the “white which is fixed at a position” corresponds to a real property. However, it should be added that the realm of pure concept and the realm of physical objects are not absolutely separated. As Fung Yiu Ming has correctly pointed out, a difference between Gongsun Long and Plato is that the pure concepts in Gongsun Long “can emerge into phenomenal thing through its *jian* 兼 (combining or joining).” (Fung 2007, p. 532) For example, when “white” and “horse” are combined together, Gongsun Long would say that the “white” and “horse” become the real properties of the white horse.

In brief, the major discovery of Gongsun Long in the *Baimalun* and *Jianbailun* is that there is a realm of pure concept which is separated from the empirical world. A same word “white” can refer to the pure concept of “whiteness” or the white color of a real white horse. This discovery is coherent with our everyday linguistic experience as the word “white” is sometimes used to describe a white horse but sometimes a white canvas. Hence, there should be a distinction between pure concepts and the

<sup>9</sup>For example, in the statement that “the word ‘horse’ is used to attribute the form [of a horse],” the corresponding logical form should be “aRb”, where a stands for “horse”, b stands for “the form of a horse”, and R stands for the two-place predicate meaning “to attribute”. This logical form is different from that of the expression “a white horse is a horse”—“ $\forall x(Wx \rightarrow Hx)$ ”, where W stands for the predicate “white horse” and H stands for the predicate “horse”.

<sup>10</sup>For more criticisms of the mass-noun interpretation proposed by Hansen and Graham. See (Fraser 2007) and (Ren and Liu 2019).

real objects. A question following this discovery is, what is the relation between the pure concept and the real objects? In other words, if a name is not first of all made to designate an object in the world but only the pure concept, in what condition can a name designate an object? This problem becomes the theme in Gongsun Long's *Zhiwulun* 指物論.

First of all, we have to clarify the meaning of “*zhi* 指” as well as the main issue in this short but complicated text. There are many interpretations of the meaning of “*zhi*”. This word literally means “finger” in Chinese language but it is obviously a philosophical term in the *Gongsun Longzi*. Fung Yu-lan equates this term with the pure concept of “white” and “horse” and proposes that it is the “universal”. Some other commentators such as Antonio Cua and Wu Fei Bai 伍非百 suggest that “*zhi*” means “signifier” while “*wu* 物” as signified. (Cua 2013, p. 310; Wu 1983, p. 521) Jing Hongxin 景鴻鑫 in his recent work even interprets “*zhi*” as the concept of “internal representation” in neural science. (Jing 2015, p. 95) I contend that both understandings are untenable. First of all, the above analysis has shown that the single term “white” and “horse” do not only refer to the pure concepts or universals but they can designate an object when used in a compound term. Second, if the *Zhiwulun* is written to convey Gongsun Long's discovery of the ontological difference between name and object, then the *Zhiwulun* is redundant. Third, Cua and Wu's interpretation of “*zhi*” as the signifier risks equating Gongsun Long's philosophy with the theory of sign of Saussure. According to Saussure, a signifier is a sound-image, the physical being of the sign. The signified is the concept that is meant by the sign. (Saussure 1959, p. 67) However, it is obvious that “*zhi*” does not designate the pure concepts but *wu*—the real empirical things in the world. The two pairs of concept (signifier-signified and *zhi-wu*) are not parallel. Finally, there is no evidence that Gongsun Long would have a concept of internal representation given that he has no knowledge of modern neuroscience. Therefore, I propose that the meaning of “*zhi*” is only derived from the literal meaning, “finger”. Fingers are used to point to something. Therefore, another literal meaning of “*zhi*” in daily Chinese language is “pointing”. Gongsun Long uses this word as a noun, so “*zhi*” in the *Zhiwulun* should be translated as “pointer”: an entity that can point to or refer to something other than itself. Accordingly, “*wu*” means that which is pointed to. The central theme of the *Zhiwulun* is therefore how something can be a pointer to refer to something.

The central statement of the *Zhiwulun* is that “everything is a pointer, but a pointer is not a pointer 物莫非指,而指非指.” (*Gongsun Longzi* 3.1; Wang 1992: 49) Rieman translates this statement according to its philosophical meaning: “Of things, none are not designated [pointed], but designation [pointing] is not designated [pointed].” (Rieman 1980, p. 307) This statement proposes a paradox concerning the philosophical ground of designation or pointing. On the one hand, there is nothing that cannot be designated. According to Leibniz's rule of individuality, the identity of an individual entity is defined by the set of predicates attributed to this entity. In other words, one can always refer to a thing by predicates. In the context of Gongsun Long, as he regards the single terms as entities instead of predicate, one can interpret that, according to Gongsun Long, a thing is no more than the set

of pointers which points to this thing. Huang Kejian 黃克劍 is therefore correct in interpreting the claim that “everything is a pointer”: “There is no apprehensible object that is not referred by names or concepts.” (Huang 2012, p. 75) However, on the other hand, if designation or pointing implies that the pointer and the pointed are different (just as the *Baimalun* shows that the attribute “white” and “horse” are different from the white horse), then how can we make sense of the pointer? If a pointer is defined by the thing it refers to, then it violates the claim that the single terms do not first of all refer to particular things but only after combination with one another. However, if it is defined by another pointer, then it will commit the problem of infinite regress or circular definition regarding which is the final defining term. In short, the pointers are ontologically different from the things in the world. Things become this thing because, and insofar as, it can be designated by pointers. However, a pointer cannot be referred to by another pointer. The *Zhiwulun* hence summarizes the paradox as follows:

[The Zhi-Wu Paradox:] If there is no pointer in the world, a thing cannot be called a thing; if the whole world is constituted by non-pointer, how can things be called pointer? 天下無指,物無可以謂物。非指者天下,而物可謂指乎? (Gongsun Longzi 3; Wang 1992, p. 49)<sup>11</sup>

This paradox shows that designation is a problematic concept. In fact, a similar observation is found in Hui Shi according to the chapter “Tianxia 天下” of the *Zhuangzi*: “a pointer never reaches [that which is pointed to]; if it reaches it, this will never stop.” (*Zhuangzi* 33; Watson 2013: 375)<sup>12</sup> The meaning of this sentence is controversial. However, if it is interpreted with the *Zhiwulun*, it can be regarded as expressing the same paradoxical character of designation; if the pointer cannot reach the pointed thing, how can we define a pointer? If a pointer is defined by another pointer, this defining pointer is further defined by another pointer. This becomes an infinite regress that never stops.

If we consider naming as a way of designation, the problem of designation is also highlighted in Daoism. The *Daodejing* says “a name that can be named is not an eternal name.” (*Laozi* 1)<sup>13</sup> This sentence hints that naming itself cannot be named. A

<sup>11</sup> Some scholars such as Huang Kejian and Pang Pu propose that this is the challenge to Gongsun Long’s opening statement raised by his opponent. This format as a debate between Gongsun Long and his opponent can indeed be found in other chapters of the *Gongsun Longzi*. No matter this question is raised by Gongsun Long or not, this does not alter the fact that this is the main challenge faced by Gongsun Long.

<sup>12</sup> 指不至,至不絕。 Watson translates this sentence as “pointing to it never gets to it; if it got to it, there would be no separation.” This translation does not convey the original meaning of “*bujue* 不絕”. The daily meaning of “*bujue*” in Chinese is “endless”, “ceaseless”. Only in seldom cases such as “*gejue* 隔絕” does the word “*jue*” mean “to separate”. Also, in Watson’s translation the first sentence means exactly the same as the second. The second sentence is just an explanation of the first sentence. This duplicated sentence structure is incoherent with other statements in the same text which are all short and without explanation. I will show that my translation makes more sense according to the problem discussed here.

<sup>13</sup> I am not going to examine whether this interpretation is applicable to the first sentence of the *Daodejing*. If this interpretation is permissible, then the first sentence of the *Daodejing* should read “a saying that can be said is not an eternal saying.” This interpretation echoes the discussion of language in our context. However, it is hard to verify that it is the original meaning of Laozi.

similar thought is found in the *Zhuangzi*. *Zhuangzi* proposes that Heaven and earth can be one with me. However, this unity cannot be named as “one”. *Zhuangzi* says, “The one and what I said about it make two, and two and the original one make three. If we go on this way, then even the cleverest mathematician can’t tell where we’ll end, much less an ordinary man.” (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 43) This passage applies the same logic as the paradox of designation: if naming or designation can be designated, it will end up in an infinite regress. These examples show that the un-namability of name or the paradox of designation is contemplated both by the Logicians and in Daoism, especially the *Zhuangzi*. This problem becomes a platform on which the philosophy of the Logicians and the *Zhuangzi* can be compared.

### 3 The Linguistic Creation of Reality

In the last section, I have shown that the problem of designation lies in the fact that designation itself cannot be designated as other things in the world. It is therefore problematic in explaining the sense of the designator or pointer. If this problem is not yet solved, it remains problematic how any pointer can ever refer to things in the world. In this section, I will show that both the Logicians and *Zhuangzi* attempt to solve this puzzle by rejecting objective realism; in other words, they both attempt to prove that the idea of objective reality cannot be independent of linguistic creation. I call this metaphysical position the linguistic creation of reality.

According to the analysis in the last section, the problem of designation is based on the discovery that pointers and pointed object are not necessarily correlated. However, once the two realms are separated, it is questionable how the two can be connected. If a name gains its meaning from the thing it refers to, then it cannot explain why names are separated from the real objects. If a name is defined by another name, it ends up at an infinite regress concerning the origin of definition. I propose that the Logicians and *Zhuangzi* try to resolve this problem by tackling the first horn of the paradox, namely, by showing that reality is always dependent on linguistic creation. If this premise holds, then the source of the meaning of designator or pointer need not be explained because it is not derived from the brute reality; rather, it is the ontological foundation of the objective world.

Gongsun Long argues this by following the logic of the *zhi-wu* paradox. He first assumes that entities can be categorized into two realms: “Pointers are those that do not exist in the world. Things are those that exist in the world. It is not permitted to regard those that exist in the world as not existing in the world.”<sup>14</sup> (*Gongsun Longzi* 3; Wang 1992, p. 50)<sup>15</sup> Based on this distinction, Gongsun Long calls the things in the world “non-pointer” (*feizhi* 非指). However, he goes on to say:

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Therefore, the investigation in this paper will stick to *Zhuangzi* who gave a more explicit response to the Logicians and hence provided more solid clue to contemplate this question.

<sup>14</sup> 指也者,天下之所無也;物也者,天下之所有也。以天下之所有,為天下之所無,未可

<sup>15</sup> Some scholars such as Huang Kejian and Pang Pu propose that this statement is raised by the opponent of Gongsun Long. (Huang 2012: 79; Pang 1979: 25) This interpretation is reasonable as



There is no pointer in the world, and things cannot be called pointer. If the things cannot be called pointer, are they called non-pointer? If they are called non-pointer, everything is referred by this [non-]pointer.<sup>16</sup> (*Gongsun Longzi* 3; Wang 1992, p. 50)

In this passage, Gongsun Long discovers that even if we call the things in the world “non-pointer”, this classification between pointer and thing is already a designation of things—we designate all things in the world as “non-pointer”. However, this “non-pointer” is a pointer instead of a thing in the world (non-pointer). Hence, Gongsun Long says:

There is no pointer in the world and things cannot be called pointer. This does not imply that there is something called “non-pointer”. There is nothing called “non-pointer”, so everything is a pointer. Since everything is a pointer, a pointer is not a pointer.<sup>17</sup> (*Gongsun Longzi* 3; Wang 1992, p. 50)

Gongsun Long seems to play a trick here. When he says there is no such thing called “non-pointer”, he means that the term “non-pointer” *per se* is not a thing. It can only entail that all things are not this “non-pointer” but it cannot infer that all things are not non-pointer. Nevertheless, I propose that Gongsun Long’s argument should not be read literally. I contend that when Gongsun Long proposes again that everything is a pointer, its meaning is different from that in the opening sentence. In the beginning, Gongsun Long proposes that “of things, none are not designated [pointed]”. However, since Gongsun has discovered that calling things “non-pointer” is already an act of designation, he realizes that it is meaningless to suppose a realm of thing that is independent of pointer and designation. In other words, every possible object is indeed constituted by pointers. This nuanced meaning is expressed by the grammatical structure of the last sentence of this quote. In the opening, it says “everything is a pointer, and a pointer is not a pointer”. Here it says, “since everything is a pointer, a pointer is not a pointer.” The “...zhe者...ye也” structure of the sentence indicates that the first sentence is an explanation of the second sentence. In other words, it means that exactly because everything is a pointer, a pointer is not a pointer. This indicates that Gongsun Long has found the reason why a pointer is not a pointer. When he Long discovers that things are constituted by pointers, the pointers are not pointers in the original sense. They are not used to designate the things in the world.

I propose that this conclusion indeed echoes the *Baimalun* in that a white horse is composed of the white which is fixed in a position and the form of a horse. According to Gongsun Long, it is not the case that there objectively exists a white horse and then we designate it by the name “white horse”. Rather, we see this horse

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other chapters of the *Gongsun Longzi* are also written in the form of dialogue. This interpretation does not alter the fact that this statement is to be refuted and revised at the end of the *Zhiwulun*.

<sup>16</sup> 天下無指,而物不可謂指也。不可謂指者,非指也?非指者,物莫非指也。

<sup>17</sup> 天下無指而物不可謂指者,非有非指也。非有非指者,物莫非指也。物莫非指者,而指非指也。



only because we see something white and something in a form of a horse. This subjectivism of perception is exemplified in the *Jianbailun* where it is held that the hardness and whiteness of the rock are subjected to our subjective sensation; they are not real properties of the rock itself.

A similar theory of linguistic creation of reality is also found in the *Zhuangzi*. In the *Qiwulun*, *Zhuangzi* explicitly challenges the existence of the realm of things that is independent of our linguistic and conceptual creation. He says:

The understanding of the men of ancient times went a long way. How far did it go? To the point where some of them believed that things have never existed—so far, to the end, where nothing can be added. Those at the next stage thought that things exist but recognized no boundaries among them. Those at the next stage thought there were boundaries but recognized no right and wrong. Because right and wrong appeared, the Way was injured, and because the Way was injured, love became complete.<sup>18</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, pp. 11–12)

This passage does not just propose that “thing” is not a necessary concept for us to acquire the world; it also shows that the concept “thing” is created in a process. First, one should have the concept of existence [*you* 有] in order to possess the concept of thing. It is common sense that whenever we talk about something, we presuppose that this thing exists. At least, it is always possible to distinguish whether a thing exists or not. Second, things must have their corresponding attributes and properties. These attributes and properties distinguish one thing from another. They are the boundaries between different things in the world. Boundary [*feng* 封] is, therefore, the second criterion of the concept of thing. Finally, *Zhuangzi* proposes that the attributes and properties of a thing are not necessarily objective. One can evaluate things by the concept of right or wrong, good or bad. These evaluative terms are the third element of the concept of “thing”. With the completion of these three concepts, the concept of “thing” is also completed. However, according to *Zhuangzi*, the completion of the concept of “thing” is already the “injury of the Way”—the disturbance of the genuine state of being of things. How does *Zhuangzi* reach this conclusion?

Similar to Gongsun Long, *Zhuangzi* proposes that things are no more than the attributions. He says, “A road is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so.”<sup>19</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 11) Moreover, according to *Zhuangzi*, calling a thing so does not only mean to designate that thing or to describe its properties; rather, *Zhuangzi* proposes that a thing is exactly created by the process of naming. He adds:

What makes them [things] so? Making them so makes them so. What makes them not so? Making them not so makes them not so. Things all must have that which is so; things all

<sup>18</sup> 古之人,其知有所至矣。惡乎至?有以為未始有物者,至矣盡矣,不可以加矣。其次以為有物矣,而未始有封也。其次以為有封焉,而未始有是非也。是非之彰也,道之所以虧也。道之所以虧,愛之所以成。

<sup>19</sup> 道行之而成,物謂之而然。

must have that which is acceptable. There is nothing that is not so, nothing that is not acceptable.<sup>20</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 11)

This passage indicates that, according to *Zhuangzi*, the “so”, or the facts about a thing are not objective. It is created by the process of “making them so” and “making them not so”. Moreover, *Zhuangzi* emphasizes that things are no more than the “so” or facts imposed on them. Therefore, “there is nothing that is not so, nothing that is not acceptable.” (Ibid.) This statement may give an impression that *Zhuangzi* is a relativist or perspectivist. However, we contend that this judgment is not appropriate because relativism and perspectivism propose that knowledge is subjective and hence cannot reflect the objective reality in itself. This problematic interpretation of *Zhuangzi* usually finds textual support from the dialogue between Nie Que and Wang Ni:<sup>21</sup>

Nie Que asked Wang Ni, “Do you know what all things agree in calling right?”

“How would I know that?” said Wang Ni.

“Do you know that you don’t know it?”

“How would I know that?”

“Then do things know nothing?”

“How would I know that?”<sup>22</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 14)<sup>23</sup>

I propose that this dialogue indeed shows that *Zhuangzi* is not a relativist. According to the ordinary relativist or skeptic perspective, we can surely judge that we have no absolute knowledge about the things in the world. In this case, Wang Ni should not reply that he does not know whether he does not know about things. Therefore Wang Ni, or *Zhuangzi*, should not be a relativist or skeptic in the ordinary sense. Furthermore, it is obvious that Wang Ni has knowledge about the nature of different living things. He says,

If a man sleeps in a damp place, his back aches and he ends up half paralyzed, but is this true of a loach? If he lives in a tree, he is terrified and shakes with fright, but is this true of a monkey? Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the proper place to live?<sup>24</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 15)

Although Wang Ni seems to present these observations as evidence that there is no common knowledge among things, this is far from being convincing evidence that

<sup>20</sup> 惡乎然?然於然。惡乎不然?不然於不然。物固有所然,物固有所可。無物不然,無物不可。

<sup>21</sup> Let us suppose Wang Ni here represents *Zhuangzi*’s philosophical position. This is a common writing style in the whole book of *Zhuangzi* that he presents his thought in the name of other people.

<sup>22</sup> 齧缺問乎王倪曰:「子知物之所同是乎?」曰:「吾惡乎知之!」「子知子之所不知邪?」曰:「吾惡乎知之!」「然則物無知邪?」曰:「吾惡乎知之!」。

<sup>23</sup> Watson translates the first question as, “Do you know what all things agree in calling right?” (Watson 2013, p. 14) However, the original question in Chinese, “*Zizhi wu zhisuo tongshi hu?* 子知物之所同是乎”, does not involve the meaning of “calling”. Neither does the word “*shi*是” here mean “right”. Since Wang Ni is replying to Nie Que about the habits of different living beings, “*shi*” here probably means “facts” (*shi* 實). Such equivalences are common in ancient Chinese. According to the Kangxi Dictionary (*Kangxi Zidian* 康熙字典), the characters “實”, “寔” and “是” can have the same meaning: “‘*shi*’ 實 should be written as ‘*shi*’ 寔. *Shi*寔 means ‘*shi*是’.”

<sup>24</sup> 民溼寢則腰疾偏死,鰐然乎哉?木處則惴慄恟懼,猿猴然乎哉?三者孰知正處?

Wang Ni is relativist because everyone would accept that knowledge can be conditional. If this is the case, why would Wang Ni refuse to admit that he has knowledge about things? I propose that a possible explanation is that “knowing” is not the appropriate verb to describe how we obtain “knowledge”. According to *Zhuangzi*, if things are so because they are called so, the so-ness or “knowledge” is not first of all objective and then being acquired by human. On the contrary, these “knowledges” are imposed when we talk about the things in the world.

According to *Zhuangzi*, therefore, the world is not itself a pre-given totality of facts for the reference of pointers and concepts. On the contrary, *Zhuangzi* says, “Heaven and earth are one pointer; the ten thousand things are one horse.”<sup>25</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2) The terms “pointer” and “horse” obviously refer to Gongsun Long. According to *Zhuangzi*, the whole world is only a pointer, just as Gongsun Long says everything is a pointer. Also, the ten thousand things are one “horse”, a pure concept. The whole world, as well as the ten thousand things, are only linguistic and conceptual creation.<sup>26</sup> According to this viewpoint, the problem of designation is only caused by the misconception that there is a reality independent of linguistic and conceptual construction. If reality is indeed a linguistic creation, this explains why naming and designation is still possible even if the physical reality seems to be separated from the realm of pure concepts.

If we regard the physical reality as totality of facts independent of naming and designation, then there is an arbitrariness between the pointer and the pointed. For example, as an opponent of Gongsun Long would suggest, a white horse can be named by “horse” or “white horse”. In this case, it is questionable why the two names can refer to the same object when they are constituted of different pure concepts. In Gongsun Long’s words, “if a horse does not have color, we can only obtain a horse. How can we have a white horse?” (*Gongsun Longzi* 3; Wang 1992, p. 43) On the other hand, according to Gongsun Long and *Zhuangzi*, naming is never simple designation but the projection of our understanding of reality. Therefore, the reality is always determined by how we conceive it. In other words, the paradox of designation is only caused by the assumption that there is a horse-in-itself or rock-in-itself which is independent of the whiteness, hardness, or horse-shape that we can sensually perceive and conceive. If the white horse, white rock, is no more than the aggregates of these conceptual articulations, then there will be no problem of why a brute reality can be designated. However, the next question is, how can we make sense of these pointers and names which we use to create the reality of the world?

## 4 Two Sources of Meaning

In this section, I propose that *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians diverge in the answer to this question. In short, the Logicians believe that the source of meaning is the pure concept acquired intuitively by the spirit (*shen* 神) while *Zhuangzi* believes that the

<sup>25</sup> 天地一指也,萬物一馬也. I have modified Watson’s translation in (Watson 2013, p. 10).

<sup>26</sup> This does not imply that the reality created by language and concepts are not objective.

linguistic creation of the world is subjected to a more primordial pre-linguistic totality.<sup>27</sup>

According to Gongsun Long, everything is constituted by the pointers. However, the pointers that constitute things in the world are not the ultimate source of meaning. As mentioned above, according to Gongsun Long, the white color that I can perceive is a result of combining the “white” and the “horse”. The concept of whiteness and horse-hood are, therefore, the foundation of the perception of a white horse. Without the concepts, the animal in front of me would not be conceived as a white horse. A white horse is that which is constituted of the white color and the horse-shape. In this sense, whiteness and horse-hood are the foundations of the constitution of the white horse as an object. However, Gongsun Long insists that the white color and the horse-shape that we perceive on a white horse are no longer pointers themselves. Just as the “white which is not fixed at a position” is different from the “white which is fixed at a position”, the white color that we see as a property of the horse is not the pure concept of “whiteness” itself. Hence, Gongsun Long proposes:

There is no pointer in the world; although everything that comes to be has a name, this name is not the pointer. It is not a pointer but is called a pointer, it means that the combined pointers are not pointer. It is erroneous to say that the name, which is indeed not a pointer, is a pointer. 天下無指者,生于物之各有名,不為指也。不為指而謂之指,是兼不為指。以有不為指之無不為指,未可。(Gongsun Longzi 3; Wang 1992, p. 51)<sup>28</sup>

This passage shows that the pointer combined with other pointers to form an object is no longer a pointer. Some scholars may claim that this passage is proposed by Gongsun Long’s opponent to challenge his point of view that everything is a pointer.<sup>29</sup> However, the next passage shows that Gongsun Long is consistent in that combined pointers are not pointer:

What you mean is the combined pointer in the world. There is no pointer in the world but things cannot exist without such [combined] pointers. They cannot be without such [combined] pointers, it does not mean that there is some non-pointer; there is no non-pointer, because everything is a pointer. The [combined] pointer is not non-pointer. The pointers combined in things are not pointer. 且指者天下之所兼。天下無指者,物不可謂無指也;

<sup>27</sup> I have interpreted this totality as the primordial living background in another paper (Kwok 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Huang and Pang suggest that this is a challenge raised by Gongsun Long’s opponent. They propose that the word “*jian* 兼” is indeed a typo of the word “*wu* 無”. They hence translate the whole sentence as, “There is no pointer in the world; although everything that comes to be has a name, this name is not the pointer. If we call this non-pointer a pointer, then there is nothing that we cannot call a pointer. It is therefore erroneous to say that the name, which is indeed not a pointer, is a pointer.” (Huang 2012: 80–1; Pang 1979: 22–3) The whole sentence thus becomes a challenge to Gongsun Long’s claim that the attributes or names that we used to designate a real object are pointers. However, Wang proposes that the word “*jian* 兼” is indeed meaningful in this context and this is not an error. (Wang 1992: 51) We support Wang’s position because we have explained that those attributes which are combined to form a name of things are no longer the pure concept. This saying is consistent with Gongsun Long’s position.

<sup>29</sup> See the note above.

不可謂無指者。非有非指也;非有非指者,物莫非指、指非非指也,指與物非指也。(Gongsun Longzi 3; Wang 1992, p. 52)

This passage clearly shows that the pointers combined with pointers have a two-fold character; on the one hand, they are not non-pointer as Gongsun Long has shown that everything is a pointer. However, on the other hand, the pointers combined in things are not pointer. A possible explanation is that the combined pointers do not refer to the object because they constitute the object itself.

According to Gongsun Long, the combined pointers are empirically perceptible through sensation. As proposed in the *Jianbailun*, sensation, such as touching and seeing, allows us to find the hardness and whiteness of the rock. However, according to Gongsun Long, sensation is not sufficient in apprehending the pure concepts. He says, “the eye cannot see but it sees with fire. However, the fire itself cannot see. Therefore, both the eye and fire cannot see but the spirit [*shen* 神] sees. If the spirit does not see, then seeing is separated.”<sup>30</sup> (Gongsun Longzi 5; Wang 1992, p. 52)

This passage divides cognition into three levels. The first level is the sensation such as seeing which requires light as the medium. The second level is the seeing of the spirit which transcends the sensation, as if there is no fire. This level can be interpreted as sensual intuition (*shen* 神). *Zhuangzi* has a similar understanding of spirit: “Perception and understanding have come to a stop, and spirit [*shen* 神] moves where it wants.”<sup>31</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 3; Watson 2013, p. 19) Spirit is hence a kind of intuitive cognition that does not depend on sensation. The third level is the most obscure because it requires the abandonment of the seeing spirit. At this stage, seeing is separated [*li* 離]. However, this does not mean that there is no cognition at all. According to Gongsun Long, hardness and whiteness are combined pointers of a piece of rock. However, when the rock disappears, “[the hardness, the whiteness, and the rock] are separated. Separation goes along with the fact [*yinshi* 因是].” (Gongsun Longzi 5; Wang 1992, p. 84) The separation is however the ultimate level of *shen*: “[we have] *shen* and not knowing [the hardness of the rock], how great is the *shen*! And this is called the ‘separated’.”<sup>32</sup> (Ibid.) In other words, separation as the ultimate level of *shen* is that which corresponds to the genuine givenness of the pure pointers. It is through *shen* that our understanding of the world is attuned to the pure concepts separable from any particular empirical experience; we can hence go along with the “fact” or “essence” without any human alteration. Therefore, in the *Zhiwulun*, Gongsun Long concludes, “moreover the pointers are certainly not a pointer in itself, it does not wait upon things to combine with them in order to become pointer.”<sup>33</sup> (Gongsun Longzi 3; Wang 1992, p. 52) This means that the pure pointers are that which are not combined with things. These pointers are not the pointers that create the world but are the pointers that transcend the world. As Gongsun Long says, “the separated is separated from the world, hence they are

<sup>30</sup> 目以火見,而火不見。則火與目不見而神見。神不見,而見離。

<sup>31</sup> 官知止而神欲行。

<sup>32</sup> 而神與不知。神乎,是之謂離焉。

<sup>33</sup> 且夫指固自為非指,奚待于物而乃與為指。

singular and rectified.”<sup>34</sup> (Ibid.) It is through the separation that the pointers are rectified.

According to the Logicians, therefore, the meanings of pointers are subjected to a pure transcendental world which can be conceived purely independent of any empirical and sensual experience. I propose that this pure transcendental world was indeed discussed by Hui Shi, according to his record in the *Zhuangzi*. Some of Hui Shi's statements are as follows:

The largest thing has nothing beyond it; it is called the One of largeness. The smallest thing has nothing within it; it is called the One of smallness. 至大無外,謂之大一;至小無內,謂之小一。

That which has no thickness cannot be piled up; yet it is a thousand li in dimension. 無厚不可積也,其大千里。

Great similarities are different from little similarities; these are called the little similarities and differences. The ten thousand things are all similar and are all different; these are called the great similarities and differences. 大同而與小同異,此之謂小同異;萬物畢同畢異,此之謂大同異。

(*Zhuangzi* 33; Watson 2013, p. 297)<sup>35</sup>

The terms such as “One of the largest”, “One of the smallest”, “no thickness”, “great similarities”, and “great difference” are terms that have no referent in the empirical world. Ideally speaking, there is nothing in the world that can be called the “One of the smallest”. Hui Shi especially holds that, “Take a pole one foot long, cut away half of it every day, and at the end of ten thousand generations, there will still be some left.”<sup>36</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 33; Watson 2013, p. 298) This shows that there cannot be a smallest unit of length and size. The search for the smallest thing in the universe is an infinitely ongoing process. These terms, such as “One of the largest”, “One of the smallest”, are therefore inconceivable according to our empirical experience. However, these terms can be well defined categorically. We can at least literally understand the formal definition of these terms even if there is no reference to the empirical world. These statements thus exemplify the possibility of a transcendental use of language: the sense of the words is understandable even with no reference to the empirical world. Therefore, we can even construct and understand statements that are semantically meaningful but logically impossible. For example, Hui Shi says “I set off for Yueh today and came there yesterday”.<sup>37</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 33; Watson 2013, p. 297) Apart from any interpretation of this statement, the paradoxical expression itself at least shows that some statements are semantically apprehensible but logically impossible.<sup>38</sup> This statement is meaningful because the meaning of

<sup>34</sup> 離也者天下,故獨而正。

<sup>35</sup> There are totally ten such statements called “the Hui Shi's Ten Paradoxical Propositions” [*“liwu shishi 歷物十事”*]. I am not going to discuss all the statement here but just to point out his philosophical stance with some examples.

<sup>36</sup> 一尺之捶,日取其半,萬世不竭。

<sup>37</sup> 今日適越而昔來。

<sup>38</sup> A major explanation of this statement is that Hui Shi has a relativistic understanding of time. Hui Shi's idea of time is beyond the scope of this paper.

every word is clear and it follows the grammatical rules. Even if this statement is contradictory, it is based on its meaning that we can judge the statement analytically false.

These examples show that the Logicians have indeed discovered the world of ideas or pure concepts which is purely constructed by concepts with no reference to empirical experience. This world of pure concepts is the foundation of all sense of the world.

*Zhuangzi*, however, disagrees with the Logicians' approach to the source of meaning. *Zhuangzi* proposes that even if we assume that pointers can be independent of our empirical world, we are still relying on pointers to convey this fact. As long as we are using pointers, concepts, and language, there is always a risk of falling back to the understanding that language conveys something independent of language. Therefore, *Zhuangzi* says:

To use a pointer to show that pointers are not pointers is not as good as using a non-pointer to show that points are not pointers. To use a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to show that a horse is not a horse. 以指喻指之非指,不若以非指喻指之非指也。以馬喻馬之非馬,不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也。(Zhuangzi 2; Watson, 2013, p. 10)

According to *Zhuangzi*, if the Logicians' analysis has already shown that the ordinary understanding of name does not appropriately reflect the real relation between name and object, the best way is to unveil this relation by non-language. I propose that this claim is best exemplified by *Zhuangzi's* "three pipings" in the *Qiwulun*. The interpretation of the three pipings is controversial. In the context of this chapter, I propose that the three pipings unveils the three levels of language or speaking. The three are the piping of humans, the piping of Earth, and the piping of Heaven. (Zhuangzi 2; Watson 2013, pp. 7–8) *Zhuangzi* claims that the piping of human is music while the piping of Earth is natural sound. I propose that this can be an analog of language. The piping of humans is the intentional sound such as music or words uttered in speech. It is the combination of a physical sound and the intended meaning. The piping of Earth, as the mere physical sound, is more fundamental than the piping of humans because the intended sound has to be first of all a physical sound. However, the piping of Earth is not fundamental. *Zhuangzi* proposes that there is the piping of Heaven which "blows on the ten thousand things in a different way, so that each can be itself—all take what they want for themselves, but who does the sounding? 夫吹萬不同,而使其自己也,咸其自取,怒者其誰邪?" (Zhuangzi 2; Watson 2013, p. 8) This piping is without any agent but it lets all things be themselves.

If we understand sound as vibration of air, then the piping of Earth is further grounded at the atmosphere that encompasses all sounding things. This air is an analogue of *qi* 氣. In *Zhuangzi's* story about the idea of fasting of the mind (*xin zhai* 心齋), Kongzi tells his disciple Yan Hui:



Don't listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don't listen with your mind, but listen with *qi*. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but *qi* is empty and waits for all things.<sup>39</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 4; Watson 2013, p. 25)

*Qi* is therefore one's primordial interconnections with things before any sensation and cognition. It is the emptiness such that I can wait for all things to emerge. The piping of Heaven should resemble this piping of *qi*. It is based on this piping that sensation and cognition are possible and hence different things in the world can be conceptually created.

I propose that his piping of Heaven can be interpreted as the pre-linguistic and pre-egoic totality of being before the separation of the subject and the object. This is why *Zhuangzi* says the piping of Heaven can only be heard when "one can completely lose oneself [*wu sang wuo* 吾喪我]." (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 8) I have compared this pre-linguistic and pre-egoic state of being with Heidegger's discussion of two attitudes toward entities in the world—present-at-hand and ready-in-hand in *Being and Time*. (Kwok 2016: 299–306) According to Heidegger, entities in the world have two states of being: the equipment ready-in-hand is the entity that is pre-theoretically encountered in our use. (Cf. Heidegger 1967) For example, when I use a pen to write a letter on the table when I am sitting in the room, the pen, the piece of paper, the table, and the room are first of all not objects of my cognition; they are ready-to-hand and are unified in the totality of the world disclosed by my action of writing. There is no distinction between them because they function as a whole in the living background. However, if this state of being is disturbed, and I turn my attention to particular things around me, I will discover that this pen is different from the piece of paper, and the piece of paper is different from the table. They become things present-at-hand and are shown forth with different shapes and color, or simply, different attributes and properties. They can hence be described by concepts.

According to *Zhuangzi*, therefore, the completion of a thing by pointers is the disturbance of the original totality of being. It is only through using [*yong* 用], or even the use of non-using [*wuyong* 無用], that an entity is not referred by its name and attributes, and hence be united with the One. Therefore, *Zhuangzi* says:

Only the man of far-reaching vision knows how to make them into one. So he has no use [for categories] (*weishi* 為是) but relegates all to the constant. The constant is the useful; the useful is the passable; the passable is the successful; and with success, all is accomplished. He relies on this alone, relies on it and does not know he is doing so. This is called the Way.<sup>40</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 11)

Different from Gongsun Long, that which is relied upon [*yinshi* 因是] is not the world of ideas or pure concept transcendental to all empirical experience; rather, that which is relied upon is this usefulness. What using unfolds is the primordial

<sup>39</sup> 无聽之以耳而聽之以心,无聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳,心止於符。氣也者,虛而待物者也。 Translation modified.

<sup>40</sup> 唯達者知通為一,為是不用而寓諸庸。庸也者,用也;用也者,通也;通也者,得也。適得而幾矣。因是己。己而不知其然,謂之道。

living background prior to the theoretical separation of subject and object. In this primordial totality of being, I am one with the whole world. On the other hand, all objects that are individualized are created by projecting concepts to divide them from this original totality. *Zhuangzi* illustrates this process by the analog of playing the lute:

There is such a thing as completion and injury. Mr. Chao playing the lute is an example. There is such a thing as no completion and no injury. Mr. Chao not playing the lute is an example.<sup>41</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 12)

When Mr. Chao plays the lute, the musical notes sprout from the lute; they are separated from the lute and hence become musical notes. Their completeness or coming-to-being is the process of separation from the origin (the lute). This does not mean that there was originally an entity called a music note in the lute and it leaves the lute. The music note is caused by the disturbance of the equilibrium state of the lute. The music note is created within this process of disturbance. If Mr. Chao does not play the lute, there is no ‘completion’ of musical notes and no ‘injury’ to the wholeness of the lute. Therefore, *Zhuangzi* says, “Their [things] dividedness is their completeness; their completeness is their impairment.”<sup>42</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 11)

Similar to the music note, everything as a thing is created by separating it from the oneness with the whole world. This separation is accomplished by the pointer, name, or concept. *Zhuangzi* therefore compares Mr. Chao’s skill of playing the lute with the knowledge of Hui Shi. (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 2013, p. 12) This comparison shows that, according to *Zhuangzi*, the Logicians’ philosophy is no different from Mr. Chao who destroys the unity of the oneness of the world and creates something separated from it. The separated, as has been shown above, is exactly the pointer that is separated from the oneness of the empirical world.

## 5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I propose that both the Logicians and *Zhuangzi* develop their philosophy by observing the distinction between a name and an object, or the pointer and that which is pointed to. Due to this distinction, name can be construed as an independent realm of reality from the empirical world. However, this leads to the problem of designation concerning how a name can refer to an object, as well as, the source of meaning of the names and pointers. This philosophical problem was first outlined by Gongsun Long in the *Zhiwulun* and responded to by *Zhuangzi*. In response to the problem of designation, I propose that both *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians advocate the linguistic creation of reality. According to this viewpoint, the objective reality against human cognition is not brute but it is created by

<sup>41</sup> 有成與虧,故昭氏之鼓琴也;無成與虧,故昭氏之不鼓琴也。

<sup>42</sup> 其分也,成也;其成也,毀也。

linguistic and conceptual construction. This explains why names and concepts can “refer” to the things other than themselves. Designation is possible not because the reality is independent of linguistic description. On the contrary, it is because there is not a brute reality that is totally independent of our conception of it. Overlooking this fact and mistaking that naming is equivalent to designation, one will inevitably get into the paradox of designation. However, based on this common discovery, *Zhuangzi* and the Logicians have two different theories of the source of meaning. The Logicians propose that the source of meaning of pointers is ideal and transcendental to both our sensation and intuition. The grasping of pointers requires the ultimate *shen* which separates pure concepts from all empirical experiences. It is based on this realm of pure pointers that we understand the world through combined pointers. *Zhuangzi*, however, argues that this is not a wise way to deal with the relation between language and reality. *Zhuangzi* proposes that we have instead already stood in a totality of being with things before any linguistic and conceptual separations. Already in this primordial state of being we have the pre-linguistic understanding of the world, for instance in use of things in the world. In this pre-linguistic experience, we understand the world without utilizing any concepts and linguistic construction. Any linguistic construction is a destroying of the original oneness of the world.

From this comparison, we can see that *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy is not irrelevant to logic as many scholars have proposed; quite the contrary, *Zhuangzi* has indeed engaged in one of the most rigorous debates in logic, and philosophy of language in ancient China with the Logicians. *Zhuangzi*’s critical attitude towards the overuse of logic and concept has a result of a rigorous philosophizing of the foundation of naming and meaning.

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# Chapter 17

## Rites Versus Nature: On the Difference Between Xunzi and Zhuangzi on Motivation of Action



Angel On Ki TING

### 1 Introduction

*Tian* 天 (heaven) in the *Zhuangzi* is often used to denote two different senses of nature. Firstly, it refers to various natural phenomena, where it is often associated with the transformation of nature, such as the succession of day and night (Watson 2013: 44) and the course of life and death (Watson 2013: 140–141).<sup>1</sup> Secondly, *tian* refers to the natural state or inborn nature of things, which points to a state that is not the result of human effort, and is often used in parallel with the description of *xing* 性 (nature). For instance, in “Autumn Floods,” having four feet is described as the inborn nature of horses and oxen and said to be the work of *tian*, while putting a halter on a horse’s head and piercing an ox’s nose are said to be the work of *ren* 人 (humans) (Watson 2013: 133).

Xunzi 荀子, like Zhuangzi 莊子, also uses *tian* to denote natural phenomena when he makes a contrast between the work of *tian* and the work of *ren*. He states that *tian* and *ren* have different duties to perform and that *ren* should not compete with *tian* in its work—the division between *tian* and *ren* (*tian ren zhi fen* 天人之分) (Knoblock, 17.1).<sup>2</sup> Also, comparable to Zhuangzi who uses *tian* to describe the natural state of myriad things, Xunzi uses the word to characterize the faculties that humans are endowed with when they are born, such as the five senses together with

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<sup>1</sup>All English translations of *Zhuangzi* are taken from Watson (2013), unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup>All English translations of *Xunzi* are taken from Knoblock (1988) unless otherwise stated.

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A. On Ki TING (✉)

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the physical body and the emotions, which he refers to as *tian guan* 天官 (heavenly organs) and *tian qing* 天情 (heavenly emotions), respectively.

Despite the fact that both Zhuangzi and Xunzi see *tian* as nature or the natural state of myriad things, they develop contrasting views towards the establishment of social institutions. Xunzi advocates the establishment of government or the formation of a Triad (*can* 參) with heaven and earth, so that natural resources can be deployed properly and social order can be established. By contrast, Zhuangzi emphasizes the idea of participating in the transformation of nature and being free from value judgments. Instead of expressing interest in the establishment of social institutions, Zhuangzi considers such institutions to be harmful to human beings. Xunzi criticizes Zhuangzi for this stance by claiming that he was ‘blinded by Nature [*tian*] and was insensible to men [*ren*]’ (Knoblock, 21.4). In this chapter, I will envision how Zhuangzi would reply to Xunzi’s criticism through analysing concepts such as *tian*, *ren* 人 (humans), *wei* 偽 (conscious activity and transformed nature), and *zhen* 真 (true) in both the *Xunzi* and the *Zhuangzi*. I will also explain their vastly different attitudes towards the establishment of the rites (*li* 禮) through examining the motivation of action in both texts. I will suggest that the rites are social institutions that aim to organize the otherwise unorganized world, dividing human beings into different social classes and allowing for the allocation of resources. In this sense, the establishment of the rites advocated by Xunzi can be seen as being motivated by the “world to mind” direction of fit of desires. (We shall explain this below). Zhuangzi, on the contrary, denounces such organization of the empirical world since he sees the myriad things essentially as a unity (*yi* 一). Upon seeing this unity of the myriad things, the desire to establish a social institution is extinguished. In order to get a better understanding of how Zhuangzi would refute the criticism made by Xunzi, it would be helpful to first look into the reason why Xunzi advocates the establishment of the rites. I shall spend some time on understanding the *Xunzi* since the views of the *Zhuangzi* can be better appreciated in terms of a contrast with the former.

## 2 *Tian, Xing and Wei in the Xunzi*

Although Xunzi is seen as a Confucian, coming after Confucius 孔子 and Mencius 孟子, he seems to have been influenced by his contemporaries in viewing *tian* as nature. This can be illustrated through a comparison with Mencius’ conception of *tian*. (Eno 1990: 131–169; Puett 2001: 39–91; Knoblock 1988 vol. 3: 9–12; Lee 2004: 20–24). Mencius believes in a conception of *tian* that lays down rules and purposes for humanity, and it is the duty of humans to uphold this heavenly decree. As humans are endowed with an incipient moral capacity, or the four sprouts (*si duan* 四端), the duty and end goal for individuals is thus to exercise this inborn moral capacity to the fullest and become moral agents (*Mencius*, 6A:6).<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> All English translations of *Mencius* are taken from Lau (2003) unless otherwise stated.

practice of the rites, together with a sense of righteousness (*yi* 義), are essential means for achieving this end (*Mencius*, 5B:7). There is an inherent connection between humanity and *tian*—humans are able to understand their own nature and the heavenly decree, and they thereby serve *tian* through exercising their heart-mind (*xin* 心) to its fullest capacity (*Mencius*, 7A:1).

Xunzi criticizes this alleged inherent connection between *tian* and humanity. Instead of seeing *tian* as having an anthropomorphic character that rewards the good and punishes the bad, he sees *tian* as natural phenomena that operate regardless of human activities. In “Discourse on Nature,” Xunzi affirms that *tian* neither rewards Yu 禹 with a good harvest for being a virtuous king nor punishes Jie 桀 with natural disasters for being a tyrant. Regardless of who is holding the throne, the celestial bodies and the four seasons continue to revolve in the same way, and the myriad things continue to live in the environment favorable to them. Whether the society is peaceful or chaotic is in fact the result of whether humans could respond to those natural phenomena properly (Knoblock, 17.1 & 17.4). For this reason, Xunzi urges people not to try to “understand nature” (*zhi tian* 知天)—not to read omens into natural phenomena (Knoblock, 17.1–17.2b).

Upholding this conception of *tian*, Xunzi thus emphasizes a division of work between *tian* and *ren*—where the work of *tian* is to provide a suitable environment for the growth of myriad things, and the work of *ren* is to establish a good government to respond to natural phenomena accordingly. The latter should not compete with the former in its work (Knoblock 17.2a). *Tian*, earth and humans each have their own duty. Contra Eno who interprets the formation of a Triad as an end given by *tian* to humans (Eno 1990:154–169), it is more appropriate to read the formation of this Triad as humans establishing a good government in response to the natural phenomena and the resources available, rather than humans forming a spiritual union with *tian*. It is based on this understanding of the division of work between *tian* and *ren* that Xunzi gives his definition of the *xing* of humans. In both “On the Correct Use of Names” and “Man’s Nature is Evil,” Xunzi claims that *xing* refers to what is endowed by *tian* when one is born, and is something that cannot be learned and acquired (Knoblock, 22.5b and 23.1c). The *xing* of humans thus includes various inborn capacities, some of which are identified by Xunzi with the word *tian*, including emotions (*tian qing* 天情), the five senses and the physical body (*tian guan* 天官), as well as the heart-mind (*tian jun* 天君) that is responsible for cognition and awareness. Besides these inborn capacities, Xunzi also asserts that humans are born with various desires (*yu* 欲), such as for food, warmth, rest and profit (Knoblock, 4.9). For Xunzi, desires are part of the *xing* of humans in that they are not acquired, and that they manifest in response to the facts and emotions of humans, and where emotions are said to be the substance of the *xing* of humans (Knoblock, 22.5b).

In contrast to the *xing* of humans is *wei* 偽 (artifact), as Xunzi reiterates in “Man’s Nature Is Evil.” While *xing* refers to the capacities that humans are born with and are expressed spontaneously and cannot be acquired, *wei*, on the contrary, refers to artifacts that can only be acquired through learning and practicing (Knoblock,



23.1c). For instance, seeing and hearing are capacities that are attributed to the *xing* of humans since they do not need to be acquired. Furthermore, the abilities to see and to hear cannot be separated from the organs of the eyes and ears—they are possessed without having to learn (Knoblock, 23.1 d). Morality (*li yi* 禮義), on the other hand, is *wei* in the sense that it is acquired and must be learned before moral behavior can be performed. It is based on these conceptions of *xing* and *wei* that Xunzi claims that humans are bad (*e* 惡) in nature. Nonetheless, Xunzi in fact does not hold an essentialist view towards human nature. Unlike Mencius who argues that humans are good (*shen* 善) by nature because each human possesses the four sprouts in his/her heart-mind, Xunzi argues that such moral capacities are not incipient in humans. Instead, morality is learned and those who believe humans are good in nature have simply failed to make the distinction between *xing* and *wei* (Knoblock, 23.1d).

Knoblock also translates *wei* as “acquired nature,” as Xunzi suggests that humans could transform their *xing* (Knoblock 1988: 143). In “On the Correct Use of Names,” Xunzi gives the definitions of *wei* as:

The mind’s thinking [*lǜ* 慮] something and the natural abilities’ acting on [*neng* 能] it is called “conscious exertion.” When thoughts are accumulated and one’s natural abilities have been practiced so that something is completed, it is called “conscious exertion” (心慮而能為之動謂之偽; 慮積焉, 能習焉, 而後成謂之偽). (Knoblock, 22.1 b)

Knoblock explains that *wei* 偽 (conscious exertion) in the above passage involves two processes that are the work of the heart-mind and the result is such that the *xing* of humans is being transformed into an “acquired nature” (*wei* 偽)—“The product of the ‘accumulated effort’ involved in repeated conscious exertion and learning” (Knoblock 1988: 143). It is also the nature possessed by sages and the noble persons after they have transformed their inborn *xing*.

As mentioned above, *wei* is often used in contrast with *xing* and often said to be external to the *xing* of humans. However, as suggested by the terms *lǜ* 慮 (thinking) and *neng* 能 (capacity), there is a sense of *wei* which involves the mental capacities one is born with. Thus, Yiu-ming Fung points out that *wei* in fact has two different senses. (Fung 2012: 192) Besides referring to human artifacts, he argues that the definition of *wei* in the quotation from “On the Correct Use of Names” (see above) also means “some kind of human potential capacity” that “can be developed or transformed into some kind of actual ability if some external conditions are met and some appropriate practices follow.” (Fung 2012: 191) He also argues that *xing* in the *Xunzi* includes mental capacities such as “knowing-thinking” (*zhilü* 知慮) and “knowing-capacity” (*zhineng* 知能), as shown in “Of Honor and Disgrace”, and that “knowing” (*zhi* 知) is a capacity possessed by the heart-mind, as suggested in “Dispelling Blindness.” (Fung 2012: 192) In other words, *wei* can be interpreted as an inborn capacity that originates from the heart-mind and that cannot be obtained through learning. Fung’s arguments for this potential capacity of *wei* is of significance in that it helps to explain how transformation of *xing* is rendered possible if humans are not born with incipient moral capacities. This shall be discussed further in the following sections.

### 3 The Transformation of Nature

For Xunzi, neither *xing* nor *wei* is sufficient in itself for transformation. He states that without *xing* there is nothing to be transformed, but it is also not possible for *xing* to refine itself without *wei*—it is only when *xing* and *wei* are conjoined that sagehood can be achieved (Knoblock, 19.6). The fact that Xunzi does not hold an essentialist view towards the *xing* of humans can further be illustrated by his emphasis on the possibility of transforming one's *xing*. As shown in “The Teaching of the Ru,” Xunzi suggests that although the *xing* of humans is spontaneous in nature, it nonetheless can be transformed (*hua* 化). Although learning is not in itself part of the *xing* of humans, humans can still make an effort toward learning. It is through constant learning and practicing that one transforms one's *xing* (Knoblock, 8.11). Such transformation is also rendered possible by having teachers and models. In “Of Honor and Disgrace,” Xunzi points out that although humans are born with pettiness, or the *xing* of ignoble people, if they are guided by teachers and models, they could refine their inborn desires and become prudent—they can be transformed (Knoblock, 4.9–4.11). People are said to have been transformed (*hua* 化) when they no longer revert to their beginning (Knoblock, 3.9c).

If Xunzi does not hold an essentialist view of the *xing* of humans, then what does good and bad refer to when he proclaims that “humans are bad in nature”? First, it should be noted that in “Man's Nature Is Evil,” when he argues that “humans are bad in nature and that goodness is the result of *wei*,” he has in mind Mencius and others who claim that humans are born with innate moral capacities. Thus, Xunzi is not arguing that humans are inherently bad in nature as opposed to being moral. Instead, humans are not born with incipient moral capacities and will not spontaneously perform moral deeds without being educated, as discussed above. Second, various scholars have suggested that Xunzi's assertion that “human nature is bad” does not address human nature *per se*, but rather focuses on the consequences resulting from the unlimited pursuit of desire. (Tang 1995: 186–187; Cua 2005: 3–38; Chong 2008: 63–78; Fung 2012: 187–200) As Fung has noted, Xunzi gives this definition of “good” and “bad” explicitly in “Man's Nature Is Evil”:

As a rule, from antiquity to the present day, what the world has called good is what is correct, in accord with natural principles, peaceful, and well-ordered. What has been called bad is what is wrong through partiality, what wickedly contravenes natural principles, what is perverse, and what is rebellious. This is precisely the division between the good and the bad (凡古今天下之所謂善者, 正理平治也; 所謂惡者, 偏險悖亂也: 是善惡之分也矣). (Knoblock, 23.3a; my modification)

Instead of describing the *xing* of humans, the above definition of “good” and “bad” in fact describes the state of a society, where “good” refers to a society that is peaceful, while “bad” refers to a society that is chaotic. (Fung, 2012: 189) Seeing Xunzi's definition of “good” and “bad” in this consequentialist way also coheres with his view towards “monstrosity” (*xian* 祲) or disastrous happenings such as famine, for instance. Instead of regarding such monstrosity as the result of an inherent human

badness, Xunzi argues that it is in fact the result of poor governance or the malpractice of the rites. For instance, the improper deployment of natural resources and insufficient regulations cause hunger and death, while poor governmental relations and the failure to install rites result in social chaos (Knoblock 17.7).

It may be argued that, on the contrary, Xunzi does suggest that humans are born with incipient moral capacities since he points out that humans are distinguished from animals in that only humans possess *yi* 義 (righteousness) in “On the Regulations of a King”. However, as Kim-chong Chong has argued, *yi* in this context does not constitute an innate moral sense but instead an ability to make distinctions. (Chong 2008: 72) For in the same passage, Xunzi goes on to discuss the possibility of forming a society (*qun* 羣) as well as the establishment of social distinction and the allocation of resources (*fen* 分). (Chong 2007: 89) In other words, *yi* means only a general capacity of making distinctions, which should be interpreted as a sense of appropriateness—to allocate resources appropriately according to social distinctions, instead of a sense of morality and justice as understood in the *Mencius*. Indeed, Xunzi argues that it is due to *fen yi* 分義 that humans are able to deploy natural resources properly. *Yi* is associated with *fen* and *fen*, in turn, is made possible due to the human capacity of *bian* 辨 (drawing boundaries). This capacity of *bian* is also a general capacity that is morally neutral. For instance, in “Of Honor and Disgrace,” Xunzi points out that the five senses of humans are capable of distinguishing (*bian* 辨) between colours, sounds, tastes and scents, and that these are the same for all humans, whether one is Yu or Jie (Knoblock, 4.9). Thus, it can be seen that even though Xunzi says that humans possess *yi*, it should not necessarily be taken to mean that humans are born with incipient moral capacities, as asserted by Mencius.

It may be argued that certain people, such as the Ancient Kings, do not need to transform their *xing* and have become sages since they were born to express their desires and emotions properly. For instance, in “The Great Compendium,” it is suggested that Shun was able to follow his desires and become orderly, and that the establishment of the rites was for the ordinary people, not the sages. (Knoblock, 27.13). Nonetheless, it is also said, immediately, that the rites are the means to sagehood, and that without learning it is not possible to become sages. Even sages such as Yao 堯, Shun 舜 and Yu also studied with teachers (Knoblock 27.13). This passage asserts that even sages need to exert themselves to learning, but is silent on whether sages need to transform their *xing*. Thus, although it is true that a sage such as Shun could follow his desires freely without abiding by the rites, this could be the state attained after he has transformed his *xing*. Besides, it would render the reading of the *Xunzi* incoherent if certain people do not need to transform their *xing*. As stated at the beginning of this section, Xunzi asserts that neither *xing* nor *wei* alone suffices for refinement, instead, they must be conjoined to achieve sagehood. Most importantly, Xunzi asserts throughout that the *xing* of all humans is one and the same (Knoblock 4.8–4.9; 5.4; 23.4a), and that the difference between sages and others lies in their *wei* and whether they exert themselves to learning the rites (Knoblock 23.5a–b). If it is held that apart from the sages, others need to transform their *xing*, it would be inconsistent with the claim that all humans share the same *xing*.

It might also be claimed that the sages do not need to transform their *xing* because they were, somehow, born with the form of the rites in them and were thus able to establish the rites. But this is refuted by Xunzi himself in “Man’s Nature Is Evil,” where he makes an analogy of a potter. Although the potter is able to make an earthenware dish out of clay, we would not regard the earthenware dish or its form as being part of the *xing* of the potter. By the same token, even though the sages were able to establish the rites, it does not mean they were born with the rites or the form of the rites. (Knoblock, 23.4a).

Up to this point, I have shown that Xunzi does not see *tian* as anthropomorphic in nature, and hence he argues that humans are not endowed with incipient moral capacities, nor are they given any teleological purposes assigned by *tian*. There is asserted to be a division of work between *tian* and *ren*. Instead of pondering over the mission given by *tian*, Xunzi argues that humans should establish a good government in response to various natural phenomena and to transform the *xing* of humans in order to obtain a peaceful society. This is done through the installation of the rites.

## 4 The Establishment of the Rites in the *Xunzi*

In “Discourse on Ritual Principles,” Xunzi asserts that humans are born with various desires and that they are born to pursue what they want. Nonetheless, if they are allowed to satisfy their desires without limit, chaos would result, since desires and resources may not sustainably be matched. It is because the Ancient Kings abhorred chaos that they established the rites (Knoblock 19.1a). The rites can thus be seen as rules or principles that organize the empirical and social world so that order could be installed and maintained. On the one hand, the rites organize the world by making proper distinctions among myriad things (Knoblock, 5.4). This includes distinguishing people into different social classes and categorizing resources available in the society, so that a functional society can be formed. On the other hand, the rites contain guidance that one must learn and practice constantly if one is to transform one’s *xing* and to become a noble person (Knoblock, 23.1b). With these two important functions of the rites, a peaceful and prosperous society can be obtained.

It is important for the sages to distinguish the myriad things and to establish a good government. Xunzi asserts that *tian* and earth cannot do these. Instead, the sage is able to organize the world through “assigning proper station” (*fen* 分) (Knoblock, 19.6). “Assigning proper station” involves inaugurating social classes so that resources could be produced and allocated correspondingly. Xunzi is well aware of the fact that people must be divided into different social classes according to their abilities, otherwise the society would not be functional: no orders would be carried out if all people become the rulers, and no commands would be issued if all people become the subjects. If all hold the same social status or offices, and given that all have more or less similar desires, then there would not be enough resources to satisfy everyone and there will be disorder (Knoblock, 9.3). There is also a practical consideration behind Xunzi’s advocating social classes, namely, for bringing

about the wealth of the country. Xunzi asserts that disorder is the result of poverty, where poverty is the consequence of people holding the same social classes or offices and fighting for the same resources (Knoblock, 9.3). Moreover, if all hold the same professions or offices, the production and consumption of resources within a country will lose its balance. For instance, a country with most people being knights and grand officers, or artisans and merchants, would result in poverty (Knoblock, 10.13). When classifying people into different social classes or professions, Xunzi emphasizes that distinctions are made according to one's talents so that each individual would receive one's due (*chen* 稱) (Knoblock 10.3a). Thus, social classes or distinctions proposed by Xunzi are not, as such, hereditary classes with privileges. Instead, people are classified into different professions according to their talents, so that each individual will be assigned to a proper place within a society to ensure "perfect peace" (*zhi ping* 至平) (Knoblock, 4.12).

The rites also contain important guidance to help ignoble people to cultivate morality and to transform their *xing*. This can be achieved in two ways: through transforming their desires and helping people to express their emotions properly. Xunzi asserts that all humans are born with the same basic desires, such as for food, warmth, rest and profit. Without guidance, they would only pursue what is in their immediate interests (Knoblock, 4.9). For instance, if they have not tasted the meat of pastured and grain-fed animals or rice and millet, they will be satisfied with coarse food. But once they have tasted the finest food, they will no longer prefer the coarse food again (Knoblock 4.10). Xunzi argues that, by the same token, people will form new desires that satisfy their long-terms interests once they have been shown the goodness of the rites. This will enhance a sustainable society (Knoblock, 4.11).

Desires are not inherently bad. However, they can be transformed. Xunzi mentions Songzi 宋子 who claims that having numerous desires is the cause of disorder in a society and that people must reduce their number of desires. Xunzi argues that such measures would not be effective as they are founded on an erroneous categorization of order and desires. For instance, whether or not a person has desires is not an issue concerning the order of a society; instead, desires are related to the category of life and death, as only dead people have no desires (Knoblock, 22.5a). In fact, Xunzi asserts that the sages are able to follow their desires in accordance with the rites without forcing themselves, nor would they suffer from weakness of will (Knoblock, 21.7d). In effect, the rites aim at prescribing and refining the kind of desires that people should have, instead of eradicating them.

The rites also help people to express their emotions properly. In "Discourse on Ritual Principles," it is stated that:

As a general principle, the rites in treating birth provides ornamentation for expressions of joy, and in sending off the dead it provides ornamentation for expressions of grief (凡禮, 事生, 飾歡也; 送死, 飾哀也). (Knoblock, 19.7b; my modification)

In other words, the rites help to shape the proper expression of emotions. For example, Xunzi explains that mourning extending into the third year is appropriate because:

The greater the wound, the longer it remains; the more pain it gives, the more slowly it heals. The practice of mourning into the third year deals with occasions when the extreme pain of grief has reached its pinnacle, so the mourning practices were established to equal the emotions expressed (創巨者日久, 痛甚者其愈遲, 三年之喪, 稱情而立文, 所以為至痛極也). (Knoblock, 19.9)

Humans exceed other animals in their awareness (*zhi* 知), and hence it would be inappropriate for humans to grieve for only a short period of time and forget about their loved ones like other animals do. Yet the mourning should not last more than three years. The three-year mourning is said to be appropriate to the facts of humans (*cheng qing er li wen* 稱情而立文) (Knoblock, 19.9a–c). It is only when the rites are performed with expressing proper emotions that they are rendered complete. As Xunzi affirms, “rites reach their highest perfection when both emotion and form are fully realized” (Knoblock, 19.2c).

This section has shown that the rites are in fact rules and principles that help to organise the otherwise unorganized world in two ways, namely, “assigning proper stations” to ensure a wealthy and peaceful society, and to transform the *xing* of people by cultivating their desires and emotions. In “Man’s Nature Is Evil,” Xunzi reiterates that the rites are the products of the sages (Knoblock 23.1c; 23.2a). But how is it possible for the sages to establish the rites and transform their *xing* if they share the same *xing* as ignoble people and if the rites are not inherent in the *xing* of humans? In the following, I am going to argue that the establishment of the rites and the transformation of *xing* are rendered possible because of the motivating force provided by desires, especially the desire to do good (*yu wei shan* 欲為善), while the heart-mind provides the justifications.

## 5 Motivational Structure in the *Xunzi*

Whether in the sense of organizing society, or in the sense of transforming a person to become more ideal, the rites in the *Xunzi* aim to bring about changes in the external world, and these changes are rendered possible because of the motivational force provided by desires. David Hume has famously claimed that “reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.” (Hume, 2.3.3) For Hume, only passions can motivate people to act, while reasons are the instrument for the satisfaction of desires. The motivating force of desires can be explained in terms of the “world to mind” direction of fit proposed by contemporary philosophers, as opposed to the “mind to world” direction of fit possessed by beliefs. John Searle points out that both beliefs and desires are intentional states that are directed at, or are about, some states of affairs, and they have opposed direction of fit. Beliefs are intentional states that have truth values, and they must fit the world to be true. For instance, I may believe that it is raining now. However, if it is not, the fault lies in my belief and hence it should be corrected. Thus, beliefs are said to have a “mind to world” direction of fit, where mistaken beliefs are corrected simply by changing what one believes (the mind) so



that it fits the world. Desires, on the other hand, are said to have a “world to mind” direction of fit. Unlike beliefs, desires are intentional states that do not have a truth value—they can only be said to be fulfilled or unfulfilled. (Searle 1983: 7–8) Elizabeth Anscombe has provided the following excellent example to illustrate this difference in the direction of fit between beliefs and desires. Consider a man going to the store with a shopping list in his hand. Whether it was he or his wife who made the list, it represents his or her intentions such that if the things the man buys do not comply with the list, the fault is in the man’s actions, which cannot be corrected by simply correcting the list. Now, imagine that a detective has been following the man and made a record of what he bought. If the detective’s record and the man’s bought items do not correspond, the fault is in the detective’s record but not in the man’s actions. (Anscombe 2000: 56). In this example, the direction of fit of the detective’s record is the same as that of beliefs, where they function as descriptions of states of affairs. The man’s shopping list, on the other hand, has the direction of fit of desires, which bring about changes in the world to fit what he wants.

In the *Xunzi*, it is the “desire to do good” that provides the necessary motivational force for the sages to establish the rites. For *Xunzi*, desires are motivating reasons for action, and without which no action would be taken. *Xunzi* asserts that people are motivated to seek that which they have not yet obtained, for “as a general rule, the fact that humans desire to do good is the product of the fact that their nature is bad” and that “whatever a man lacks within himself he is sure to desire from without” (Knoblock, 23.2b, my modification). For instance, generally speaking, those who are ugly want to be beautiful, and those who are poor want to be rich. If one has already obtained a desired state of affairs, the desire will have been satisfied and there will be no need to seek it further (Knoblock, 23.2b). Indeed, when people are rich enough, they may no longer pursue wealth but may go after something else they lack instead, such as a higher social position or fame. At any rate, having a desire implies that a state of affairs has not yet been reached, and actions are required to bring it about. In this sense, desires in the *Xunzi* have the “world to mind” direction of fit as described by Searle and Anscombe. Since the definitions of “good” and “bad” in the *Xunzi* have the contextual reference of the condition of a society as argued above, the “desire to do good” in the *Xunzi* implies that societal order has not yet been established and action is required to bring about peace. This understanding of desires is thus consistent with *Xunzi*’s claim that the sages aim to bring order to society by establishing the rites because they abhor the disorder arising from fighting over limited resources.

If desires are the motivating force for the sages to establish the rites, the role of the heart-mind is to provide the knowledge necessary for the task. Although humans are endowed with the five sense organs, these only function to receive and distinguish data. They do not themselves make judgments. Only the heart-mind has the cognitive capacity (*zheng zhi* 徵知) that is capable of judging and determining what should be approved (*ke* 可) (Knoblock, 22.2e). However, the heart-mind can be blinded (*bi* 蔽) by various things, such as desires or aversion, what is remote or what is near, broadness or shallowness, antiquity or modernity (Knoblock, 21.1). If the heart-mind is blinded, it will obtain false beliefs and thus make wrong judgments.



As illustrated in “Dispelling Blindness,” a man named Juan Shuliang 涓蜀梁 mistook his own shadow to be a crouching ghost and eventually died of fear when he reached home (Knoblock, 21.8). It is thus most important for the heart-mind to understand the way (*Dao* 道)—a standard which helps to dispel all obsessions that blind the heart-mind. This can be obtained when the heart-mind is in a state of emptiness (*xu* 虛), unity (*yi* 一) and stillness (*jing* 靜) (Knoblock, 21.5d). In other words, the understanding of the way can be regarded as a practice that enables someone to be free from biases; and those who have embodied such practice are said to have the “Great Pure Understanding” (*da qing ming* 大清明). With this “Great Pure Understanding,” one is able to acquire knowledge of the empirical world: one is able to perceive myriad things without biases or obsessions and assign them properly to their own places, and be able to understand the laws behind order and disorder. In fact, the mental capacities of those with the “Great Pure Understanding” are said to be so powerful that they are able to know about affairs in the world without leaving their home, as well as about the past even though living in the present (Knoblock, 21.5e). Most importantly, through understanding the way, the heart-mind is able to make correct judgments (Knoblock, 21.6b).

I suggest that it is through this capacity of the heart-mind to understand the way and embody the “Great Pure Understanding” that the sages are able to establish the rites. In “Man’s Nature Is Evil,” Xunzi asserts that there is a principle (*li* 理) behind humaneness, morality, the model of law, and rectitude (*ren yi fa zheng* 仁義法正) that can be understood by all humans, and that everyone, not just the sages, possesses the capacities to know (*ke yi zhi* 可以知) and to practice (*ke yi neng* 可以能) humaneness, morality, the model of law, and rectitude (Knoblock 23.5a). The difference between the sages and ordinary people lies in the difference between having the capacity (*ke yi wei* 可以為) and having the ability (*neng wei* 能為) (Knoblock, 23.5b). The sages are able to become sages because of their exceeding power in terms of *wei* (Knoblock, 23.2a).<sup>4</sup> I suggest that the establishment of the rites is rendered possible because the sages exceed the ordinary people in terms of their working hard and exerting the cognitive power possessed by the heart-mind in reaching the state of emptiness, unity and stillness, and the embodiment of the “Great Pure Understanding,” so that they are able to acquire knowledge of the empirical world and make correct judgments. With the exertion of this capacity of the heart-mind, the sages are thus able to understand and discern the principle behind humaneness, morality, the model of law, and rectitude, while the heart-mind of others remain blinded and hence unable to understand the way. Should the ordinary people come to exert their heart-minds to attain the state of emptiness, unity and stillness and understand the way, they too would be able to understand the principle behind humaneness, morality, the model of law, and rectitude and become sages.

In my interpretation of the establishment of the rites, the exertion of *wei* is seen as a cognitive power possessed by the heart-mind. This is consistent with the

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed discussion between capacity (*ke yi* 可以) and ability (*neng* 能), please see (Chong 2007: 67–81).

understanding of *wei* proposed by Fung's argument discussed in an earlier section, where it is a potential capacity consisting of *lǜ* (thinking) and *neng* (activating). (Fung 2012: 192) As pointed out by Fung, *lǜ* and *neng* are often mentioned together with natural endowment (*cai xing* 材性) and knowing (*zhi* 知), and are described as being part of the *xing* endowed by *tian*. (Fung 2012: 192) Moreover, as discussed above, the heart-mind is the only organ that possesses cognitive capacity. Thus, I suggest that *wei* could be understood as the knowing and activating capacities of the heart-mind that makes possible the establishment of the rites.

In sum, I suggest that while desires provide the motivating force for the sages to establish the rites and to bring order to a society, the heart-mind of the sages is responsible for acquiring knowledge that is necessary for the establishment of the rites by being unbiased and making the correct judgments.

My above interpretation of desires and the heart-mind in the *Xunzi* may be controversial, for some scholars have objected to the notion that desires can be the reason for humans to do good, arguing instead that indulgence in desires only lead to disorder. Besides, my reading seems to be incompatible with Xunzi's claim that the heart-mind is the commander in chief as stated in "Dispelling Blindness." Other scholars, have, however, argued for the motivational function of desires in the *Xunzi*. (Wong 1996: 202–223; Hagen 2011: 53–70; Sung 2012: 369–388; Van Norden 2000: 103–134; Yearley 1980: 465–480) I suggest that desires are the necessary condition for the establishment of the rites, though they are not sufficient for two reasons. First, as discussed above, Xunzi never advocates the eradication of desires, for they are part of the *xing* of humans—everyone, including the sage, has desires. Xunzi even denounces doctrines that are dedicated to getting rid of desires (Knoblock, 22.5a). Desires in themselves are not bad for Xunzi; it is only when they are not satisfied properly that they lead to chaos. Thus, what is important for him is not the eradication of desires, but the proper allocation of resources, which is also one of the aims of the establishment of the rites. In the end, the sage "follows his desires and fulfils his emotions" without the use of self-endurance (Knoblock, 21.7d). Thus, desires need not be blotted out of Xunzi's picture of the transformed *xing*. Second, although Xunzi does suggest that the heart-mind is the lord of the physical body and the commander in chief that only issues orders but never takes any, this could be interpreted as the heart-mind being in charge of choosing the correct objects of desires to be pursued. In "On the Correct Use of Names," Xunzi asserts that desires are expressed independently of whether the objects of desires can be obtained or not, but it is the heart-mind that determines and approves the correct objects of desires (Knoblock, 22.5a). In other words, although desires are motivating forces, whether one should be motivated to act upon them still requires the approval of the heart-mind. Xunzi asserts that although all humans are born with the same basic desires and want the same things, there is, nonetheless, a difference in terms of knowledge (*zhi* 知) among them. Hence, different people would employ different ways to satisfy their desires, and approve differently of what to pursue. (Knoblock, 10.1). As the heart-mind is the only organ that is capable of knowing, the differences in how desires are satisfied depends on the differential knowledge of people. Since the heart-mind is responsible for knowing and acquiring knowledge

of this empirical world, and the knowledge acquired has only “mind to world” direction of fit that lacks motivational force, it is the desires that provide the necessary motivation for the establishment of the rites.

In sum, Xunzi emphasizes the division between *tian* and *ren*, with their different responsibilities. While the responsibility of *tian* is to provide humans with resources, the responsibility of *ren* is to establish a good government. On the one hand, the rites help to organise the society by distinguishing people into different social classes and professions, so that resources could be allocated accordingly. On the other hand, the rites cultivate the desires and emotions of people so that they are expressed properly and they would be morally transformed. The establishment of the rites is motivated by the desire to do good (in terms of bringing about social order), while the heart-mind is important in acquiring knowledge of the empirical world so as to approve which desires should be satisfied.

The above account will help us to understand, by contrast, Zhuangzi’s emphasis on following nature, instead of establishing the rites. If Xunzi’s ideal is to establish the rites to organize the society and to transform the *xing* of ignoble people with an emphasis on bringing about changes in the empirical world, then Zhuangzi’s ideal can be seen as a stark contrast.

## 6 Zhuangzi’s Notion of “Truth” vs. Xunzi’s Notion of “Wei”

Although Zhuangzi also advocates the separation between *tian* and *ren*, he would disapprove of the idea of “division between *tian* and *ren*” advocated by Xunzi. In “The Great Venerable Teacher,” at first glance, it seems that Zhuangzi also advocates such a division by claiming that ultimate knowledge involves knowing the difference between the work of *tian* and that of *ren* (Watson 2013: 42). Nonetheless, as Kim-chong Chong has pointed out, Zhuangzi almost immediately suggests that this distinction is not always self-evident, or even absolute. (Chong 2011b: 325–326) Instead, true knowledge (*zhen zhi* 真知) only comes after the true person (*zhen ren* 真人), and what constitutes true knowledge depends on a certain attitude of the true person. The true person is the ideal in the *Zhuangzi* and is said to possess various abilities, such as “entering water but not getting wet,” and “entering fire but not getting burned.” There are various discussions on whether these attributes are mystical attributes possessed by people who cultivate their “vital energy” (*qi* 氣) in religious Daoism, or if they are metaphors that describe an emotional attitude—that is, a sense of equanimity, no matter what happens. (Chong 2011b: 333–337) In either case, this ideal true person is said to be able to reach a unity between *tian* and *ren* so that “*tian* and *ren* do not defeat each other” (Watson 2013: 44) In effect, Zhuangzi does not advocate a clear and firm distinction between the work of *tian* and that of *ren*. However, he clearly denounces the establishment of the rites, together with the idea of *wei* or what is man-made, as a violation of *tian*.

For Xunzi, the establishment of the rites is rendered possible because of a correct distinction among the myriad things, and that the Confucian rites are the best way

to organize the society compared to the policies of other schools such as Mohism (Knoblock, 10.8). Zhuangzi doubts whether such a value judgment is possible. He believes that when people seek to make distinctions, they are destroying the way (*dao* 道) and giving rise to partiality. For Zhuangzi, the way is a unity, and each school of thought constitutes only one perspective and merely part of the way. In the story of “Three in the Morning” in “Discussion on Making All Things Equal,” a group of monkeys are unhappy with having only three acorns in the morning and four in the evening, but feel satisfied when their trainer agrees to give them four in the morning and three in the evening instead. However, from the perspective of the trainer, it makes no difference in either case since he is giving out the same number of acorns a day (Watson 2013:11). In another story in “The Great and Venerable Teacher,” a man is so afraid that his boat will be stolen that he hides it in a mountain. But even though he thinks it will be safe there, a giant comes at night and steals the whole mountain. If the man could instead see his boat as only being part of nature and hiding it in nature, he would never lose his boat (Watson 2013: 45). To Zhuangzi, people who argue for conventional values (and this would include someone like Xunzi), are like the monkeys and the man who is afraid of losing his boat—they suffer from making distinctions, but forget that they are in fact part of the unity of the way. As he asserts, “Heaven and earth are one attribute; the ten thousand things are one horse” (Watson 2013: 10). It is only when people stop making distinctions that they are able to recognize the unity of the way. For instance, although the knowledge of Zhao Wen 昭文, Music Master Kuang 師曠 and Huizi 惠子 was close to perfection, Zhuangzi contends that they were in fact as foolish as those (namely, the Logicians) who debate about the distinctions of hardness and whiteness (Watson 2013: 12)—they are foolish in the sense that they do not understand that the more clarifications they have made, the more destruction is inflicted on the *dao* or the way.

If making distinctions, and hence value judgments, destroys the unity of the way and should be renounced, so should the capacity of *wei* held to be possessed by the heart-mind. As we have seen, Xunzi argues that the heart-mind is able to understand the way and to determine what should be approved, and that the way is “crafted” and expressed through dialectics and explanation (Knoblock, 22.3f). For this reason, Xunzi contends that the noble people must engage in debates (*bian* 辯) (Knoblock, 5.9).<sup>5</sup> Zhuangzi denounces such activities, for they prescribe distinctions. When a thing is described by means of language, it is only from one particular perspective, leaving out other aspects. By the same token, if language is used to describe the way, the description is bound to be incomplete. Thus, the unity of the way is obscured by the variety of utterances made by different schools of thought. Most importantly, Zhuangzi sees the use of language as the result of culture and customs, and hence arbitrary. A thing is acceptable simply because it is said to be so, making it a subjective judgment. For instance, people may think that Maoqiang 毛嫱 and Lady Li 麗姬 are the most beautiful women in the world, yet fish would dive into the pond, birds would fly away, and deer flee when they see them (Watson

<sup>5</sup> Knoblock translates *bian* 辯 as “discrimination”.

2013: 15). From the point of view of the way, Maoqiang and Lady Li are neither beautiful nor ugly, and value judgments result only when humans start making distinctions and approve of things according to their own judgments. Thus, instead of using this arbitrary system to understand the way, Zhuangzi would rather abandon it, and let the way reveal itself.

Not only does Zhuangzi renounce the making of distinctions and the establishment of the rites, he also asserts that living one's life in accordance with the rites is not the only ideal. LIN Shuen-fu 林順夫 suggests that Zhuangzi sometimes criticizes the Confucian way of self-cultivation and the rites in the textual guise of Confucius. This is illustrated, for example, by the deaths of Guan Longfeng 關龍逢 and Bi Gan 比干 in "In the World of Men," where self-cultivation is said to be "a love for fame and will result in personal harm." (Lin 1989: 388) Besides, Confucius is sometimes portrayed as considering himself "at a very low level of spiritual awareness" compared to Daoist sages such as Mengsun Cai 孟孫才, Wang Tai 王骀, Chang Ji 常季 and Zisanghu 子桑戶, and is also depicted as showing appreciation for the "perfect virtue" advocated by Zhuangzi. (Lin 1989: 392) In "The Great and Venerable Teacher," when Zisanghu dies, Confucius sends his disciple Zigong 子貢 to help with the funeral. When Zigong arrives, he sees Mengzifan 孟子反 and Ziqinzhang 子琴張 playing music and singing. Zigong expresses disapproval when he returns, claiming that what Mengzifan and Ziqinzhang were doing was inappropriate as it is not in accordance with the rites. Confucius, instead of sharing this disapproval, realizes that he was being "stupid" (*lou* 陋) as compared with Zisanghu, Mengzifan and Ziqinzhang, for he was bound by the rites (*you fang zhi nei* 遊方之內), while they were beyond it (*you fang zi wai* 遊方之外). Lin points out that it is possible that Zhuangzi is disguised as Confucius here, and "through him we hear the admiration of the transcendence of the *chih-jen* [*zhi ren* 至人] and the renunciation of Confucius' attachment to this world of dust and dirt as well." (Lin 1989: 393) For Xunzi, one of the functions of the rites is to allow emotions to be expressed properly, and hence he would agree with Zigong that it is inappropriate to play music and sing during a funeral. However, Zhuangzi, in the guise of Confucius, would doubt if that is the only proper way of expressing one's emotions. He even goes further to denounce the rites by making Confucius look "stupid" in front of those who truly understand the unity of the way.

The renunciation of cultivating oneself in accordance with the Confucian rites can also be illustrated by Zhuangzi's emphasis on the importance of preserving the *zhen* (truth 真). *Zhen* in the *Zhuangzi* refers to the spontaneous or inborn nature of things. For instance, in "Horses' Hoofs," it is said that the "true nature" (*zhen xing* 真性) of horses is "to munch grass, drink from the stream, lift up their feet and gallop" (Watson 2013: 65). This describes the natural state of horses. Also, in "Autumn Floods," after mentioning that having four feet is the inborn nature of horses and oxen, and putting a halter on the horse's head and piercing the ox's nose is the work of man, we are urged not to overcome *tian* and to guard the inborn nature. This is said to be "returning to the True" (*fan qi zhen* 反其真) (Watson 2013: 133). In "Robber Zhi," Zhuangzi criticizes the Confucian sage kings and claims that "all of them for the sake of gain brought confusion to the Truth within them, that they

forcibly turned against their true form and inborn nature” (Watson 2013: 66). Zhuangzi accuses Confucian practice of being “a fraudulent, crafty, vain, hypocritical affair,” and “not the sort of thing that is capable of preserving the Truth within” (Watson 2013: 258).

Furthermore, in “The Old Fisherman,” even though Confucius is acknowledged as benevolent, he is at the same time described as wearying his mind, wearing out his body, and “putting the Truth in peril” (Watson 2013: 272). When Confucius asks what *zhen* is, Zhuangzi, in the guise of the Fisherman, replies:

By “The Truth” I mean purity and sincerity in their highest degree.... Therefore a person who forces oneself to lament, though one may sound sad, will awaken no grief. A person who forces oneself to be angry, though one may sound fierce, will arouse no awe. And a person who forces oneself to be affectionate, though one may smile, will create no air of harmony. True sadness need make no sound to awaken grief; true anger need not show itself to arouse awe; true affection need not smile to create harmony. When a person has Truth within himself, one’s spirit may move among external things. That is why the Truth is to be prized!... (真者,精誠之至也。……故強哭者雖悲不哀,強怒者雖嚴不威,強親者雖笑不和。真悲無聲而哀,真怒未發而威,真親未笑而和。真在內者,神動於外,是所以貴真也!)(Watson 2013: 275–276; my modification)

To appear sad, to have forced anger and forced affection may be in conformity with the rites, but these are denounced by the Old Fisherman. In effect, Zhuangzi does not regard self-cultivation in accordance with the rites to be beneficial to a person. Neither does he think that Confucian practice is in accordance with the natural facts about humans. In fact, Zhuangzi points out that the external form is not important in helping a person to express true emotions. Thus, the more one practices self-cultivation in accordance with the rites, the more is lost, and the more distant one is from *zhen*. As Zhuangzi said to Confucius, “You fell into the slough of human hypocrisy (*wei* 偽) at such an early age and have been so late in hearing of the great Way!” (Watson 2013: 276).

In sum, we can make the following comparison between Xunzi and Zhuangzi. The former sees *wei* as the cognitive capacity possessed by the heart-mind that allows humans to establish the rites, so that the world would be organized and the *xing* of humans could be refined and transformed accordingly to achieve a peaceful society. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, sees both the cognitive capacity of the heart-mind and the establishment of the rites as alien to the *xing* of humans. As he asserts in “The Old Fisherman,” sages would not bind themselves to the practice of the artificial rites and “rites are something created by the vulgar men of the world” (Watson 2013: 276). Zhuangzi certainly does not deny the fact that humans have various duties and emotions; however, he believes that they need not rely on the rites to perform their duties or to express their emotions. In a natural state, people drink together and are merry without worrying whether they are using the proper vessels; when they die, friends and loved ones grieve without doubting whether they should grieve according to the rites. Indeed, Zhuangzi himself is depicted as singing at the funeral of his wife, a behaviour which Xunzi would condemn. As Zhuangzi sees it, the practice of the rites is like adornment on horses and oxen that eventually lead them away from *zhen*. Only the fool would dedicate himself to such practice. Zhuangzi would see the transformation of *xing* as advocated by Xunzi as harmful to



humans. This is notably illustrated in the story of Hundun 渾沌 in “Fit for Emperors and Kings.” Hundun is the emperor of the central region born without “seven openings” (representing the five senses). One day, he invites Emperor Shu 儵 and Emperor Hu 忽 to his place. In order to thank Hundun for his warm hospitality, the two emperors decide to bore the seven openings into him, believing that since it would be beneficial for Hundun. They therefore bored one hole each day, but on the seventh day, Hundun died (Watson 2013: 59). The death of Hundun is caused precisely by his friends imposing what they think is good on him, despite the fact that having five senses is not part of Hundun’s inborn nature. Metaphorically, in the eyes of Zhuangzi, in forcing the rites on humans, Xunzi would be no different from what Shu and Hu have done. Hundun can be read metaphorically as the natural state of humans which has been destroyed by the Confucian sages in imposing the rites.

## 7 The Motivational Structure in the *Zhuangzi*

As we have seen, in regarding *tian* as being devoid of heavenly decree and purposes for humans to pursue, Xunzi believes the duty of humans is to set up a good government to manipulate and deploy the myriad things so as to maximally satisfy their interests. People should cultivate themselves and transform their own *xing* in order to bring about a peaceful society—an act of bringing changes to the human condition. In contrast, when using *tian* to describe the transformation of nature, or to portray the inborn nature of myriad things, Zhuangzi also implies the notion of fate (*ming* 命)—the fact that there are “things that man can do nothing about” (Watson 2013: 27). These include, for instance, human relations such as parenthood (Watson 2013: 27), life and death, wealth and poverty, worthiness and unworthiness, failure and success, thirst and hunger, as well as coldness and heat (Watson 2013: 39). Humans are put in these situations by *tian*. These are “inevitable” (*bu de yi* 不得已) and cannot be changed. Though confronted with these inevitable situations, Zhuangzi urges people not to renounce their *zhen* and to face the inevitable with equanimity rather than purposefully trying to change their fate (Watson 2013: 133). The result is an ideal vision of life that advocates participation in the transformation of nature. There is a notion of ultimate freedom here which is rendered possible only by following nature, fasting one’s heart-mind and becoming unified with the way.

Zhuangzi would criticize Xunzi’s emphasis on using the cognitive capacity of the heart-mind to make distinctions and value judgments, for such a heart-mind can never be empty and free. This is illustrated in Zhuangzi’s criticism of Huizi. In “Free and Easy Wandering,” the King of Wei gives Huizi some gourd seeds. When the gourds grow, Huizi finds them useless as they are too big to be made into water containers or dippers and he smashes them into pieces (Watson 2013: 5). In another story in the same chapter, Huizi tells Zhuangzi about a tree whose trunk is too gnarled and bumpy and whose branches are too bent and twisted, so that it is impossible to be made into furniture. He deems the tree to be useless and worthless



(Watson 2013: 6). In these stories, Huizi is portrayed as a man with a heart-mind filled with conventional values. He uses his own conventional perspective to judge what is useful and valuable. However, Zhuangzi criticizes him for having “a lot of underbrush” in his heart-mind (Watson 2013: 6). In other words, he is bound by prejudices and never looks beyond the conventional uses of gourds and trees. In effect, Zhuangzi thinks Huizi is not able to empty his own heart-mind and forget the distinctions that he makes. Zhuangzi criticizes him for failing to follow the nature of the gourds and the gnarled tree. Zhuangzi suggests that the gourds could be made into great tubs to float along the rivers, and the tree could be left alone to provide shelter for people and animals.

Besides criticising the use of the cognitive capacity of the heart-mind in making distinctions and value judgments, Zhuangzi would also criticize Xunzi for advocating that a heart-mind should be filled with knowledge. In the criticisms directed at Huizi, Zhuangzi highlights the idea that being bound by conventional values could be harmful—Huizi is bound by his own conceptions of usefulness and this causes him distress. The best way to preserve oneself is to follow one’s inborn nature, which is metaphorically represented by the uselessness of the big tree. It is precisely because the tree follows its own nature that its life is not shortened by axes, and that nothing can ever harm it.<sup>6</sup> In “The Secret of Caring for Life,” Zhuangzi tells the story of Cook Ding. The marvellous way in which he cut up the ox functions as an analogy for the best way to preserve one’s life. While a good cook changes one’s knife once a year, and a mediocre cook changes it once a month, Cook Ding is said to be able to preserve his knife for nineteen years. He never hacks like a mediocre cook but instead cuts between the joints where there is enough space for his knife. Cook Ding is able to follow the nature of the ox, so that his knife is well preserved (Watson 2013: 19–20). In other words, following the nature of the myriad things enables self-preservation and would also allow freedom from conventional judgments of value.

Zhuangzi puts forward the practice of sitting in oblivion and fasting the heart-mind. This serves to stop the heart-mind from making value judgments, and in the process, all pre-established values are also forgotten. One will even forget being bound by a physical body, sense perceptions and intellectual activities—eventually, a state is reached in which there is no distinction between oneself and the external world, instead becoming unified with it. In “The Great and Venerable Teacher,” Yan Hui 顏回 is said to have made progress through forgetting capacities like benevolence and righteousness as well as through forgetting the rites and music. Eventually he forgets everything, including his own limbs and organs, and becomes one with the Great Thoroughfare (*da tong* 大通) (Watson 2013: 52–53). The more Yan Hui forgets Confucian values, the more progress he makes. Lin concludes that “Chuang Tzu’s [Zhuangzi’s] abolishing of knowledge, sense perception, and intelligence goes against Confucius’ stress on education and learning.” (Lin 1989: 394)

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<sup>6</sup>Many scholars have discussed the importance of clearing away one’s prejudices in the *Zhuangzi*. See (Chong: 2011a: 427–443 and 2011b: 324–346; Cook 2003: 64–87; Fraser 2014: 197–212; Puett 2003: 248–262).

In “In the World of Men,” the fasting of the heart-mind is described as:

Make your will one! Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your heart-mind. No, don’t listen with your heart-mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the heart-mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits on all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the heart-mind. (若一志,无聽之以耳而聽之以心,无聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳,心止於符。氣也者,虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者,心齋也。)(Watson 2013: 25; my modification)

The heart-mind is said to “stop with recognition.” WANG Shumin 王叔岷 suggests that this state of mind means the heart-mind stops when it “fits” (*fu* 符) the external world. (Wang 1988: 132) This fitness can be further illustrated by the mirror metaphor in “Fit for Emperors and Kings:”

The Perfect Person uses one’s heart-mind like a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore one can win out over things and not hurt oneself. (至人之心若鏡,不將不迎,應而不藏,故能勝物而不傷。)(Watson 2013: 59; my modification)

The mirror simply reflects, or “fits” the external world as it is—it does not add anything to this reflection. It will not hide from ugly faces, nor only welcome beautiful ones. It will not distort an ugly face into a beautiful one. In fact, the mirror does not make any distinction between ugliness and beauty, nor does it make any value judgments that beauty is good and ugliness is bad, for these kinds of distinctions or judgments do not matter to it. In effect, when the heart-mind stops upon “fitting” the world, it will not seek to change the external world according to its predilections. Instead, it simply responds to the world by emptying its pre-established values and clearing away its prejudices. Instead of installing social institutions and shaping people to take on certain characteristics, it is better to forget all values entirely. The world is what it is—no particular thing is better than anything else, for everything is part of the unity of the way.

This response of the heart-mind to the external world in the *Zhuangzi* can, in a sense, be seen as a “mind to world” direction of fit, where the heart-mind acquires beliefs that fit the world. Instead of generating desires that seek to bring about changes in the external world to align with it, the heart-mind comes to accept the fact that humans are merely part of nature and the way, and hence are participating in the transformation of nature. Thus, humans should realize that having a human form is not better than being a tree, for all of the myriad things are part of nature and the way, and all are participating in the same transformation (Watson 2013: 45). As Zhuangzi says to Yan Hui through the mouth of Confucius, “If you’ve been transformed, you must have no more constancy” (Watson 2013: 53). Possessing this belief that humans are participating in the transformation of nature with myriad things, the desire to establish social institutions in the empirical world for human interests is extinguished, for such institutions are not the proper objects of desires—they do not do any good to humans and instead only cause harm.

## 8 Conclusion

Through analysing the concepts of *tian*, *ren*, *zhen* and *wei* in the *Xunzi* and the *Zhuangzi*, I have tried to show that although both *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi* share a conception of *tian* as the empirical world and the natural state of the myriad things, they have vastly different attitudes towards social institutions and the Confucian rites in particular. *Xunzi* affirms a stark contrast between *tian* and *ren*. He argues that if humans are to live in a peaceful society, they must be assigned different social distinctions and professions. They need also to transform their *xing* so that both desires and emotions are properly expressed. The rites are social institutions created by humans to achieve these aims; they are *wei*, or artifacts, that stand in contrast to what is given by *tian*. Even though humans distant themselves from their natural state through such practices, human nature is said to be “beautified” rather than destroyed. *Xunzi* praises such changes, regarding them as essential to human flourishing. *Xunzi*’s criticism of *Zhuangzi* as being “blinded by *tian* and was insensible to *ren*” can thus be seen as accusing *Zhuangzi* of ignoring the need to establish a good government for sustaining both resources and human desires in order to bring order to a society.

This description of *Xunzi*’s view enables us to see more clearly, by contrast, the view of *Zhuangzi*. The latter sees the making of distinctions between the myriad things and establishing artifacts as undesirable. This is because nature is a unity from the perspective of the way, and the value systems upheld by various schools of thought destroy this unity. *Zhuangzi* would reply to *Xunzi*’s criticism by arguing that imposing the rites on humans only brings harm, instead of being beneficial. Also, *Zhuangzi* also suggests that people often find themselves in unavoidable situations and where nothing can be done to change them—this is fate, and any attempt to change the inevitable would be futile and might cause further harm and distress. In order to preserve oneself and gain emotional equanimity, one must understand that these circumstances are only part of the transformation of nature.

In this chapter, I have also suggested that the vastly different attitudes of *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi* towards the establishment of social institutions can be explained in terms of a desire-belief model. As desires have the “world to mind” direction of fit, they provide the necessary motivational force for one to act. Nevertheless, beliefs are able to influence one’s action through providing knowledge of the proper objects of desire. For *Xunzi*, the establishment of the rites can be seen as being mainly motivated by the “desire to do good.” This aims at bringing order to a society through the instalment of social institutions. The heart-mind functions to provide information about the correct objects of desire in order to achieve a harmonious society. In contrast to *Xunzi*, who emphasizes the cognitive capacity of the heart-mind in making distinctions and acquiring knowledge of the empirical world, *Zhuangzi* sees the making of distinctions and value judgments as practices that are harmful to humans and should be abandoned. Each myriad thing in this world, in fact, is under constant transformation and composes only part of the way. To see the world as composed by distinct categories and to classify them is to hold a wrong

belief about nature. The benefit of practicing sitting in oblivion and fasting the heart-mind is that it allows a person to forget distinctions and cease making value judgments. Thus, instead of generating desires to bring about changes in this world, one is reminded of the fact that one is only a part of nature and the way, and participating in the transformation of nature. In effect, the desire to install social institutions would be extinguished.

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# Chapter 18

## The *Zhuangzi* and Wei-Jin *Xuanxue*



Yuet Keung Lo

### 1 Introduction

Before 443 during the Liu-Song period (420–479) when the Imperial Academy was established to prepare students for civil recruitment, four kinds of learning were offered as a makeshift curriculum; they were *Xuanxue* 玄學 (Dark Studies), *Ruxue* 儒學 (Confucian Studies), *Wenxue* 文學 (Literary Studies), and *Shixue* 史學 (Historical Studies).<sup>1</sup> While Confucian Studies covered ten Confucian classics including the *Analects*, the curricula for the other three kinds of learning remain unknown today. In the Liang dynasty (502–557) following the Liu-Song, the *Book of Changes*, the *Laozi*, and the *Zhuangzi* were collectively called “Sanxuan” 三玄 (Three Texts on the Mysterious/Mystical/Profound).<sup>2</sup> Thus, albeit probably anachronistic, it is now generally assumed that the Liu-Song curriculum of *Xuanxue* consisted of the studies of “Sanxuan.”<sup>3</sup> In modern Western scholarship, *Xuanxue* is often translated as Neo-Daoism (Chan 2008, 2009), because two of the “Sanxuan” texts were the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* and their interpretations were markedly different from what the two Daoist classics themselves might actually say. Further, the novel readings gave rise to new issues of philosophical, moral, literary, and cultural significance that consumed the best minds of early medieval times. Thus, the

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<sup>1</sup> Shen 1974: 8.93.2294–95. It is not clear if the four kinds of learning became the official curricula in the Imperial Academy or if they continued to be offered at all.

<sup>2</sup> The classification of the studies of “Sanxuan” was still in use in early Tang times (seventh century).

<sup>3</sup> Wang 2002: 187.

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intellectual landscape then was dominantly Daoist in many respects. However, focusing on the nature of the issues pertaining to “Sanxuan” as they were explored since the third century, many scholars now prefer to render *Xuanxue* as Dark Learning because they were contemporaneously identified as *xuan* 玄 (dark/mysterious/mystical/profound/abstruse).

In historical retrospect, *Xuanxue* was not created at one single stroke; it was decades in the making, although the thinkers who shaped and contributed to it did not actually recognize it as such even if they were aware of it. Nevertheless, modern studies of *Xuanxue* primarily examine it as a coherent system of philosophical ideas with a linear development and the prevailing view identifies four major stages in its development. They are: (1) *Xuanxue* in the Zhengshi 正始 reign (240–249) of the Wei dynasty (221–265), initiated by HE Yan 何晏 (d. 249 CE) and WANG Bi 王弼 (226–249 CE), who were considered founders of the new philosophical movement; (2) *Xuanxue* represented by the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, particularly RUAN Ji 阮籍 (210–263) and Ji Kang 嵇康 (224–263);<sup>4</sup> (3) *Xuanxue* in the Yuankang 元康 period (291–299) of the Western Jin dynasty (265–317), represented by GUO Xiang 郭象 (d. 312); and 4) *Xuanxue* in the Eastern Jin (317–420), represented by ZHANG Zhan 張湛 (dates unknown) and with Buddhist influences.<sup>5</sup> Chronological periodization, however, does not mean continuous philosophical development. Indeed, little philosophical connection can be detected between and among the periods, except for the dialogue across time between WANG Bi and GUO Xiang on a number of metaphysical issues and the nature of the sage. For instance, WANG argued that the myriad things come from an ultimate source called Nonbeing (*wu* 無) which is void of concreteness and specificity but GUO opposed by advocating the doctrine of autogenesis (*zisheng* 自生), which states that things come into being of their own accord, and that there was never a time when things did not exist at all. He emphasized that the universe as a whole is Being (*you* 有) as always. As far as we know, GUO was probably the only thinker who could challenge his formidable predecessor systemically on philosophical grounds in spite of his indebtedness to him. Indeed, his contemporaries considered him “second [only] to WANG Bi” (王弼之亞). Modern scholars almost invariably credited the accolade to GUO’s eloquence in disputation, but it is clear that the comparison was based on the two towering figures’ thinking skills, shared interests in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* as well as a range of philosophical issues.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, both thinkers expressed their philosophy primarily in the form of commentary; WANG wrote a commentary each on the *Book of Changes*, the *Laozi*, and the *Analects* (only fragments extant), while GUO wrote one each on the *Zhuangzi*, the *Laozi*, and the *Analects*, with the latter two extant only in fragments. Regardless, modern scholars unanimously agree that WANG Bi and GUO Xiang represented the twin peaks of *Xuanxue* philosophy.

<sup>4</sup>For a study of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, see Lo 2015: 425–448.

<sup>5</sup>For a brief study of *Xuanxue*, see Lo 2019b: 522–529.

<sup>6</sup>ZHANG Zhi 張鷟, *Accounts of Literary Scholars* (*Wenshi zhuan* 文士傳), quoted in LIU Xiaobiao’s 劉孝標 commentary to SSXY 4.17, Xu 1987: 111–112; the reference in question is not found in Mather.



Since the mid-second century with the Latter Han dynasty on its decline, literati felt powerless and alienated from the corrupt politics at court and faith in the Confucian commitment to public service gradually grew weak. Meanwhile, Daoist philosophy and lifestyle became appealing to a growing spectrum of educated men, and interest in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* began to surge as literati sought refuge and new meanings in their personal lives. Living in reclusion, for example, became increasingly popular.<sup>7</sup> All the notable figures such as those mentioned above in the standard history of *Xuanxue* studied the *Zhuangzi* and many wrote commentaries and essays on it. For instance, RUAN Ji composed an essay called “Da Zhuang lun” 達莊論 (Understanding the *Zhuangzi*) and a rhapsody entitled “Daren xiansheng zhuan” 大人先生傳 (Biography of Master Great Man) which valorized the protagonist who aspired for spiritual transcendence in the fashion of the Spiritual Man (*shenren* 神人) glorified in the *Zhuangzi*. Before XIANG Xiu 向秀 (227–272), one of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, penned his *Zhuangzi yinjie* 莊子隱解 (Hidden Meanings of the *Zhuangzi*), dozens of commentaries had already been produced. Indeed, it is fair to say that of the “Sanxuan,” the *Zhuangzi* probably exerted the most powerful influence on the development of *Xuanxue*.<sup>8</sup> While the reasons were multiple, the charismatic personality of ZHUANGZI portrayed in the *Zhuangzi* certainly contributed to the text’s unprecedented popularity. Compared to the shadowy figure LAOZI (Old Master) identified as the author of the *Laozi*, whose nondescript lifestyle did not particularly appeal to literati and scholar-officials in early medieval times, ZHUANG Zhou’s happy-go-lucky way of life and impudent defiance inspired people of incorruptible integrity and provided a convenient camouflage for impostors at once. Readers idolized ZHUANGZI and tried to emulate him in various ways. In contrast to RUAN Ji’s sincere aspiration to become a Spiritual Man himself in order to escape from his frightful existence in a dangerous political environment, the son-in-law of Emperor Hui (r. 290–307) of Western Jin, who indulged himself in luxurious living, had a painting of ZHUANG Zhou hanging in his mansion to declare his admiration. In fact, it was common for people to intone words of tranquillity and put up the portraits of LAOZI and ZHUANGZI in their homes (戶詠恬曠之辭, 家畫老莊之象).<sup>9</sup> When XIANG Xiu completed his commentary on the *Zhuangzi* and showed it to his good friends Ji Kang and LÜ An 呂安 (d. 262), the latter upon reading it exclaimed that “ZHUANG Zhou isn’t dead!”<sup>10</sup> He was not so

<sup>7</sup>Berkowitz 2000.

<sup>8</sup>Although WANG Bi did not compose a commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, his philosophy was nevertheless influenced by it. His ground-breaking repudiation of the Image-and-Number approach to the *Book of Changes* apparently was inspired by the *Zhuangzi*’s view on the relationship between word and meaning (expressed in the fish-and-fish-trap analogy). For a brief discussion of the influence of the *Zhuangzi* on WANG Bi, see Jiang 2009: 42–49, Fang 2017: 453–458. The immense popularity of ZHUANG Zhou explains why critics would blame the *Zhuangzi* for moral depravity and dereliction of public duties prevailing among the literati. WANG Tanzhi 王坦之 (330–375), for example, wrote an essay titled “Abandon ZHUANGZI” (廢莊論) in which he complained that the work benefitted far fewer people than it harmed.

<sup>9</sup>Fang 1974: 8.89.2301–2302.

<sup>10</sup>*Shishuo xinyu* (SSXY) 4.17; Xu 1987: 111, Mather 1976: 100–101.

much impressed with XIANG's hermeneutical skills as his ability to make alive their imagined model of transcendent living. In fact, according to another account, "everyone who read it (XIANG's commentary) felt released as if he had merged beyond the dust of the world to peer into Absolute Mystery. For the first time such a one understood that beyond sight and hearing there is a divine power and abstruse wisdom which enables one to leave the world behind and pass beyond all external things. Even though such a one might again be made to become an agitated and competitive man, he would look to view all he had traversed, and in every case with a sense of revulsion would of his own accord feel a desire to be rescued."<sup>11</sup> Evidently, the impact of XIANG's commentary went beyond the philosophical and reached the personal, and its power was personified in the exemplar of ZHUANG Zhou. Given its intimate affinity with XIANG's *Hidden Meanings*,<sup>12</sup> GUO's commentary, too, was endowed with similar transformative power. Indeed, in spite of his admiration of ZHUANG Zhou's spiritually uplifting philosophy in his commentarial vision,<sup>13</sup> GUO found fault with him as a person who failed to realize it in realpolitik. Nevertheless, it is clear that ZHUANGZI and GUO Xiang shared a symbiotic relationship that no other commentator was able to cultivate in early medieval China. Although GUO's philosophy was inspired by ZHUANGZI, it in turn also opened up many new possibilities of reading the *Zhuangzi* faithfully, thus complicating and enriching it beyond the imagination of the readers and commentators before his time with the possible exception of XIANG Xiu. This was fully appreciated even centuries after *Xuanxue* as a cultural phenomenon had passed into history.

Once, Chan master DAHUI Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163) asked a young devout woman about a monk's response to a famous koan, and she replied, "People say that GUO Xiang wrote a commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, but it was actually ZHUANGZI (Master ZHUANG, aka ZHUANG Zhou 莊周, 365–290 BCE)<sup>14</sup> who wrote one on GUO Xiang[']s commentary]" (人謂郭象註莊子, 却是莊子註郭象). The master was impressed. Many years later, in 1162 at the age of sixty-eight, the woman finally left the household life and became a Chan master herself as a dharma heir to DAHUI Zonggao. Her name now was WUZHOU Miaozong 無著妙總 (1095–1170). This episode betrays not only the lasting influence of GUO Xiang's commentary but also its complicated relationship to the text it professed to explain.

<sup>11</sup> DAI Kui 戴逵 (ca.331–296), "On the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove" 竹林七賢論, cited in LIU Xiaobiao's 劉孝標 (462–521) commentary on the *Shishuo xinyu*. See SSXY 4.17; Xu 1987: 111, Mather 1976: 100–101.

<sup>12</sup> According to accounts in traditional sources, the attribution of the commentary to GUO Xiang was controversial as he was accused of plagiarizing an earlier commentary by XIANG Xiu. Although it is clear that GUO's commentary is similar to his predecessor's, only fragments of which survive, significant differences are present as well that reveal GUO's own philosophical views. See Tang 1983. KANG Zhongqian 康中乾 even argued for GUO's sole authorship. See Kang 2005.

<sup>13</sup> GUO Xiang commended the *Zhuangzi* for its spiritually uplifting power in similar language as did the author of "On the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove." See GUO's Preface to his commentary in Guo 1985: 3.

<sup>14</sup> The tentative dates for ZHUANG Zhou are given by QIAN Mu. See Qian 2002: 696.

Was GUO faithful to the *Zhuangzi* or did he actually put his own ideas under its disguise? Although the answer was unequivocal to WUZHOU Miaocong, it would be helpful to ascertain if she was correct.

Tradition has it that GUO Xiang was responsible for the received version of the *Zhuangzi* as we have it today, which consists of thirty-three chapters in three clusters called the Inner, Outer, and Mixed Chapters. While the text is eclectic in nature espousing a varied mix of doctrines, GUO's commentary treated it as a work of a unified philosophy and his explication thus exhibits a coherent and interrelated system of ideas, even though he did not think all the chapters in his received version came from one single author, namely, the historical figure ZHUANG Zhou. GUO admitted that he expunged about one-third of the text and mentioned the titles of three such chapters.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, his commentary was interested in constructing his own philosophy rather than explicating that of ZHUANG Zhou. In this regard, it is markedly different from the composite text of the *Zhuangzi* it claims to explain. More importantly, GUO even invented concepts of his own such as *duhua* 獨化 (lone transformation) and *xiangyin* 相因 (intergrowth) and reinterpreted identical terms such as *xing* 性 (spontaneous nature), *fen* 分 (inborn allotment), *ziran* 自然 (self-so), and *li* 理 (coherence, principle) that appear in the *Zhuangzi*. Such innovative efforts certainly distinguished GUO Xiang as an independent philosopher in his own right, however much inspiration he might have drawn from the *Zhuangzi*. In a sense, the fundamental differences between ZHUANG Zhou and GUO Xiang highlight some of the characteristics of *Xuanxue*. Given space constraints, this chapter outlines only some of them with an emphasis on the ideal of transcendent living as this was the common aspiration for the majority of so-called *Xuanxue* thinkers and their copycats.

## 2 Inner Sagacity and Outer Kingliness

The expression *neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王 (inner sagacity and outer kingliness), which appears only once in the final (Mixed) chapter of the *Zhuangzi*,<sup>16</sup> was meant to capture the Way of the ancients, and the integration of inner and outer was characterized as “complete” (*quan* 全) and “thorough” (*bei* 備). The inner refers to self-cultivation that enables men of ancient times to unify themselves with the powers of heaven and earth<sup>17</sup> whereas the outer pertains to their abilities to bring order and benefits to the common people. In the chapter, we are told that although ZHUANG Zhou attained inner sagacity to its utmost, he struggled to practice outer kingliness

<sup>15</sup> See Guo Xiang's Postface to his *Commentary on the Zhuangzi*, which is quoted in full in Yu 2004: 421.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, it was the only such expression in extant sources from pre-Han times.

<sup>17</sup> The powers of heaven and earth are variously described: as the source and goal of self-cultivation, they are called “ancestor” (*zong* 宗); in terms of their essence, they are called “refinedness” (*jing* 精); in terms of their unchanging nature, they are called “true” (*zhen* 真). See Guo 1985:1066.

as he was not quite able to respond to the inexhaustible, unceasing, and subtle transformations of things as he encountered them and bringing appropriate solutions to them (雖然,其應於化而解於物也,其理不竭,其來不蛻,芒乎昧乎,未之盡者) (Guo 1985:1099). The “things” (*wu* 物) in question refer to affairs beyond his personal self, and primarily to matters related to governance. In other words, ZHUANG Zhou fell short of “complete” and “thorough” inner-outer integration.<sup>18</sup> While this characterization of the historical figure cannot be ascertained, the inner-outer dyad of self and other as well as their interaction was indeed consistent with the philosophy evidenced in the *Zhuangzi* as a whole. As it turned out, GUO Xiang also insightfully identified this dyad as the fundamental characteristics of ZHUANG Zhou’s philosophy, and he baldly accused him of being a talker rather than a doer on this basis.<sup>19</sup>

Little is known about ZHUANG Zhou; he was portrayed as someone who was averse to politics and lived like a recluse in the extant accounts of him, the majority of which come from the book of *Zhuangzi* itself. The factuality of these often-humorous tales need to be taken with a grain of salt but the unconventional personality of ZHUANG Zhou was captured vividly. Presumably, they were some of the “biographical” sources for GUO Xiang’s evaluation. Yet, internal evidence from the seven Inner Chapters traditionally attributed to ZHUANG Zhou himself suggests that he was not entirely indifferent to politics; the “Renjianshi” 人間世 and “Ying diwang” 應帝王 chapters betray his concern for the welfare of all under heaven as well as his willingness to political participation for public interests.<sup>20</sup> Philosophically, this is coherent with ZHUANG Zhou’s views that “all things are equal” (*qiwu* 齊物) and that we should respect things as they are (*yinshi* 因是)—both are argued in the “Qiwulun” 齊物論 (Inner) chapter. Viewed in this light, politics, being one aspect of the human condition particularly for the intellectual elites in the Warring States period, deserves equal respect that other aspects may enjoy. Yet, important as it may be, political participation does not appeal to all types of temperament and demands moral commitment; ZHUANG Zhou honored himself for what he was and conducted himself appropriately in the political climate and environment, which he perceived to be treacherous. He practiced his doctrine of *yinshi*, respecting both his unique personality and the political arena as he knew it. A judgment call in political engagement is as much an expedient discretion as a temperamental preference; it does not, in principle, contradict one’s philosophical attitude toward politics.

Indeed, according to his biography in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE) *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Archivist), although ZHUANG Zhou reportedly declined an offer to be minister of state from the King of Chu, he served as guardian of a lacquer-tree park in his home state of Song (modern-day Henan

<sup>18</sup> GUO believed that the characterization came from ZHUANGZI himself. See Guo 1985: 1102.

<sup>19</sup> See the Preface to the *Commentary on the Zhuangzi*, Guo 1985: 3. Although there may be some uncertainty about its authorship, scholars generally accept that the Preface was written by GUO Xiang. For two persuasive arguments, see Feng 1986: 4:181–185 and Yu 2004: 415–421.

<sup>20</sup> For a study of ZHUANGZI’s interest and engagement with politics, see Lo 2019a.

Province)—apparently the only position he had ever accepted.<sup>21</sup> It is telling that the low-ranking job essentially dealt with harmful trees rather than people. Testimony abounds in the *Zhuangzi*, which shows that ZHUANG Zhou did not dismiss politics indiscriminately. In the “Xiaoyao yao” 逍遙遊 chapter, we are told that although XU You said he had no use for rulership and rejected Sage King YAO’s offer of the throne, he respected the latter’s good governance and asked him to stay with his charge. That XU was deemed worthy of the offer means that he was fully capable of ruling the world, so his refusal had a different motivation. XU compared himself to “the tailorbird which builds her nest in the deep wood, and uses no more than one branch” and “the mole which drinks at the river, and takes no more than a bellyful” (Watson 1968: 32). Clearly, temperament made the difference. XU’s humble analogies echo ZHUANG Zhou’s willingness to work as a park keeper. Apart from the attitude toward politics, the *style* of rulership seems to be critical as well. Even the Spiritual Man on faraway Guyi Mountain, who “doesn’t eat the five grains, but sucks the wind, drinks the dew, climbs up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas” (Watson 1968: 33), does not refrain himself from benefitting the world. The artistic portrayal betrays a carefree lifestyle, which is often overlooked by the philosophical eye. Yet, in spite of his aloofness from the hustle and bustle of the human world, the Spiritual Man, “by concentrating his spirit,” “can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful” (Watson 1968: 33). Evidently, his miraculous powers on the external world must have come from his inner self-cultivation, but he would rather make only the minimal effort to benefit all creatures without directly getting involved in the practical details of the complex and multifaceted task, which inevitably involves human interaction.

Beyond the Inner Chapters, explicit statements about inner sagacity and outer kinglyness are plentiful. For instance, “Tiandao” 天道 (Outer) chapter says:

Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction are the root of the ten thousand things. To understand them and face south is to become a ruler such as Yao was; to understand them and face north is to become a minister such as Shun was. To hold them in high station is the Virtue of emperors and kings, of the Son of Heaven; to hold them in lowly station is the way of the dark sage, the uncrowned king. Retire with them to a life of idle wandering and you will command first place among the recluses of the rivers and seas, the hills and forests. Come forward with them to succor the age and your success will be great, your name renowned, and the world will be united. *In stillness you will be a sage, in action a king* (emphasis mine). Resting in inaction, you will be honored; of unwrought simplicity, your beauty will be such that no one in the world may vie with you.

夫虛靜恬淡寂寞無為者，萬物之本也。明此以南鄉，堯之為君也；明此以北面，舜之為臣也。以此處上，帝王天子之德也；以此處下，玄聖素王之道也。以此退居而閑游江海，山林之士服；以此進為而撫世，則功大名顯而天下一也。靜而聖，動而王，無為也而尊，樸素而天下莫能與之爭美。夫明白於天地之德者，此之謂大本大宗，與天和者也；所以均調天下，與人和者也 (Watson 1968: 143).

<sup>21</sup> According to the episodes in the *Zhuangzi*, ZHUANG Zhou seemed to prefer to live on his own means; he declined an offer to be prime minister from the state of Chu, and instead fished, hunted (even poached), and weaved his own sandals to eke out a living. Understandably, he was poor and sometimes was compelled to borrow from his friends.

Inner and outer are differentiated but neither is privileged despite their narrative order. The inner, embodied in “emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction,” can be equally cultivated and effectively practiced by people in vastly different social roles, and in private life and public office. Both political engagement and reclusive lifestyle are honored. Unmanifested in interactive practice with the external world, one is “in stillness” and called a “sage” (*sheng* 聖), and when one engages with it in action, one is considered a “king” (*wang* 王). Inner and outer are integrated in the effective practice of nonaction (*wuwei* 無為), and this is exactly what the final Mixed Chapter (“Tianxia” 天下) calls “inner sagacity and outer kingliness.”

In real life during Wei-Jin times, spiritual transcendence was deemed incompatible with social conduct and public duties.<sup>22</sup> For instance, SUN Chuo 孫綽 (314–371) confessed that he was not good at “deliberating on policies suited to the times, or ways of ruling the present world” but he “set [his] thoughts from time to time on the Mysterious and Transcendent (*xuansheng* 玄勝) and intone from afar the words of LAOZI and ZHUANGZI. Lone and aloof in lofty retirement, [he] didn’t concern [his] thoughts with temporal duties.”<sup>23</sup> In GUO Xiang’s understanding, outer kingliness pertained to social conduct and public duties whereas inner sagacity was perhaps the ultimate if elusive goal that many *Xuanxue* thinkers pursued; his commentary attempted to transform the mundane into the lofty and to integrate the two equally worthwhile modes of life for the literati elites.

Modern Chinese scholars on *Xuanxue* 玄學 (Dark Learning, or Neo-Taoism) invariably credit GUO Xiang for successfully integrating the Confucian moral and socio-political philosophy, called “teaching of names” (*mingjiao* 名教) in early medieval times, with the Daoist doctrine of spontaneity (*ziran* 自然) (Mather 1969–1970; Tang 1983 and Tang 1983).<sup>24</sup> In his philosophy, conformity with moral norms, social mores, and public duty does not compromise one’s spontaneous nature and spiritual attainment. In commenting on the episode about the Spiritual Man mentioned above, GUO said:

This is nothing but an allegory. The Spiritual Man is what we call the sage today. Although the sage sits in the ancestral hall, his mind is no different than someone who lives in the mountains. How can people in the world recognize this? They only see him riding [on a chariot with] a yellow silk canopy and wearing the jade seal, and think that is sufficient to tie down his mind; when they see him traversing mountains and rivers and doing the same things common people do, they think that is sufficient to wear out his spirit. How could they know he is not susceptible to debilitation who has reached the ultimate?

此皆寄言耳。夫神人即今所謂聖人也。夫聖人雖在廟堂之上，然其心無異於山林之中，世豈識之哉！徒見其戴黃屋，佩玉璽，便謂足以纓絀其心矣；見其歷山川，同民事，便謂足以憔悴其神矣。豈知至至者之不虧哉（Guo 1985: 28）

<sup>22</sup> SSXY 3.18, 9.36; Xu 1987: 284–285, Mather 1976: 89, 258–259.

<sup>23</sup> SSXY 9.36; Xu 1987: 285, Mather 1976: 258–259.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that GUO Xiang did not use the term *mingjiao* in his writings; in fact, it seldom appeared in the literature from early medieval times. In *A New Account of Tales of the World*, for example, it occurred only two times (SSXY 1.4, 1.23; Xu 1987: 4, 14, Mather 1976: 5, 12), but it clearly referred to teachings related to social and public conduct.



Although ZHUANG Zhou's Spiritual Man cares about the welfare of all creatures, he is reluctant to get involved in politics; and the seemingly nonchalant yet effective effort he makes to benefit all is so imperceptible that it earns him "no merit" (*wugong* 無功). According to the "Xu Wugui" 徐无鬼 (Mixed) chapter, the Spiritual Man "hates to see the crowd arriving, and if it does arrive, he does not try to be friendly with it; not being friendly with it, he naturally does nothing to benefit it (是以神人惡眾至, 眾至則不比, 不比則不利也).<sup>25</sup> This captures the spirit of the Spiritual Man accurately. In contrast, GUO refashioned the Spiritual Man into a sage who wholeheartedly takes center stage in the political arena to assist the myriad things in realizing their own natures. Thus, even though there is an inner-outer connection in the two versions of Spiritual Man, they are essentially dissimilar. When GUO complained that ZHUANG Zhou was an armchair philosopher, he criticized not only his personal failure to influence the world he lived in but his impractical philosophy as well. Yet, the commentator overlooked the critical issue of temperamental difference.

GUO Xiang himself had an intense ambition in politics and calculated his move in order to progress in his political career. He turned down offers of low-ranking positions in the local government until he finally managed to gain the trust of Prince Donghai 東海王, who took control of the court and coveted the throne of the weak emperor. The prince employed wicked and sycophantic protégés in his clique who arbitrarily presided over court affairs; as one of its members GUO became secretary to his tutor and his power "fumed and scorched the court, inside and outside" (熏灼内外).<sup>26</sup> Temperamentally, GUO Xiang and ZHUANG Zhou could not be more different and their attitudes toward politics were diametrically opposite, and the commentator's criticism of ZHUANG Zhou easily exposed his personal bias. Although the integration of inner sagacity and outer kingliness was a common ideal for both ZHUANG Zhou and GUO Xiang, it required not only political philosophy but also personal temperament to become a reality.

### 3 Spontaneous Nature and Self-Cultivation

Inner sagacity is rooted in self-cultivation. For ZHUANG Zhou it is the pursuit of maximal transcendence (*da* 大) and optimal freedom in carefree wandering (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊), symbolized in the image of the gigantic Peng bird which flies from the Northern Darkness to the Southern Darkness across the full span of heaven. In its earlier form, the Peng bird was a colossal Kun fish which lived in the depths of the Northern Darkness. The stratospheric flight requires the cultivation of "great

<sup>25</sup> Guo 1985: 865; Watson 1968: 276.

<sup>26</sup> Details of GUO Xiang's character and life primarily come from contemporary sources; his biography appears in the *History of the Jin Dynasty* (*Jinshu* 晉書). See Fang 1974: 5.50.1396–1397. For a more detailed discussion of GUO Xiang's character and its impact on his philosophy, see Lo 2020: 368.



knowledge” (*dazhi* 大知) and takes preparation of long duration; it is by no means an instinctual or impulsive act. ZHUANG Zhou obviously took the trouble to detail in artistic language what made the flight possible and what it implied for self-cultivation. However, GUO Xiang flatly dismissed it all as he said: “I am not familiar with the truthfulness of Kun and Peng. The point ZHUANG Zhou wanted to make is about carefree wandering and self-attainment resulting from nonaction, so he pushed the [notions of] bigness and smallness to their limits in order to illustrate the appropriate fit for their respective spontaneous natures and inborn allotments. Scholars with a panoramic perspective should grasp his overall message and disregard the device that conveys it; it is not necessary to contrive an explanation for every detail [in his device]. The main point, then, will not be compromised and all the details may be ignored” (鵬鯤之實，吾所未詳也。夫莊子之大意，在乎逍遙遊放，無為而自得，故極小大之致，以明性分之適。達觀之士，宜要其會歸而遺其所寄，不足事事曲與生說，自不害其弘旨，皆可略之耳) (Guo 1985: 3). Paying no attention to the details of ZHUANG Zhou’s allegory, GUO focused on the message itself, which, he thinks, was about carefree wandering as a form of self-attainment (*zide* 自得) through nonaction, and the allegory of Peng bird and little quail was meant to exemplify the appropriate fit (*shi* 適) for their respective spontaneous natures (*xing* 性) and inborn allotments (*fen* 分).

On the superficial level, *fen* is not used as a philosophical concept and the term *xing* does not appear at all in the Inner Chapters while both terms are key concepts in Guo’s commentary. More importantly, the adverb-verb construction *zi de*, as opposed to a noun construction in Guo’s usage,<sup>27</sup> appears only once in the Inner Chapters where it means “to recognize one’s achievements and success as such” (當而不自得), which is discouraged (Guo 1985: 226). Although ZHUANG Zhou talked about “feeling at one’s ease” (*zishi qishi* 自適其適) instead of “feeling at someone else’s ease” (*shi renzhishi* 適人之適), which may be construed to mean a form of “self-attainment,” it does not concern either one’s spontaneous nature or inborn allotment as to how to feel comfortable in one’s own skin.<sup>28</sup> For GUO, however, spontaneous nature is that which shapes and determines a thing and its development; it is natural, necessary, and unalterable. In terms of its limitations, it is called inborn allotment.<sup>29</sup> He said: “Spontaneous natures each have their own allotment... How is it possible that they can be altered in the midway [of their development]” (性各有分，豈有能中易其性者也) (Guo 1985: 59)? Such views of spontaneous nature and inborn allotment actually come from the Outer and Mixed Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. For GUO, it is inadvisable to feel at someone else’s ease because one would have lost one’s own spontaneous nature (*shixing* 失性).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> GUO used the noun phrase *zide* more than 100 times in his commentary.

<sup>28</sup> The expression *shi renzhishi* also appears once in the Outer Chapters, and GUO interprets it the same way. See Guo 1985: 233 and 329.

<sup>29</sup> Also, he said: “Natures received from heaven each have their original allotment, which can neither be avoided nor augmented” (天性所受，各有本分，不可逃，亦不可加). See Guo 1985: 128.

<sup>30</sup> Guo 1985: 233.

Guo's inherited views of spontaneous nature and inborn allotment have profound implications for his theory of self-cultivation. As he explained, "big things simply must be born in big places and big places must produce big things [such as the Peng bird]. Invariably, this is how coherence is formed of self-so. 直以大物必自生於大處, 大處亦必自生此大物, 理固自然" (Guo 1985: 4). The correspondence between different manifestations of bigness is bound and inevitable, this is what GUO called self-so; and as long as the correspondence is commensurable, it is deemed appropriate (*dang* 當) because things and their places "cohere" together of their own accord. Of course, the same reasoning is also true of small things and small places. Thus, the gigantic Peng bird and the little quail are equally carefree and self-attained in fulfilling their spontaneous natures as they find their own appropriate correspondence in spite of their unequal flying abilities and ambitions. Big and small are meaningless in terms of intrinsic worth. Therefore, maximal transcendence is out of the question and its pursuit as a universal ideal is even dangerous because it would harm things whose spontaneous natures are not commensurate with it. In fact, the goal of the myriad things including human beings is to live in correspondence with their spontaneous natures rather than transcend them. This is what is meant by "proper" (*zheng* 正). Self-cultivation, then, seems to be rendered irrelevant. As GUO elaborated, "self-so means being the way it is of its own accord without artificial effort. Thus, the big Peng can soar high and the little quail can fly low, the rose of Sharon can live long and the morning mushroom can live short. Such are competences due to the way these things are rather than what they do. Being competent of their own accord without making any effort, this is why [the way they are] is considered proper 天地以萬物為體, 而萬物必以自然為正。自然者, 不為而自然者也。故大鵬之能高, 斥鴳之能下, 椿木之能長, 朝菌之能短, 凡此皆自然之所能, 非為之所能也。不為而自能, 所以為正也" (Guo 1985: 20). Effort and competence are dichotomized and their relationship is acasual. This is foreign to ZHUANG Zhou.

For ZHUANG Zhou, effort and competence are causally linked, and he would say it is no cultivation at all to be "competent of one's own accord without making any effort." In his vision, the Spiritual Man refrains from eating the five grains and opts to subsist on wind and dew against the natural tendency of human beings; he is not bound by instinctive needs. But GUO's comment reads: "Eating the five grains like everyone else yet being the Spiritual Man all by himself, this shows that the Spiritual Man is not made of the five grains; rather he is singularly endowed with the wonderful pneuma of spontaneity (俱食五穀而獨為神人, 明神人者非五穀所為, 而特稟自然之妙氣). This is one of the many examples of his deliberate misreading of the *Zhuangzi* even though it was partially informed by ideas of spontaneous nature and inborn allotment in the Outer and Mixed Chapters. For GUO, the Spiritual Man is a product of natural, if special, endowment, much like the Peng bird and everything else; he is bound to have his miraculous powers for which ordinary human beings should not even aspire. He has his own natural habitat that empowers him to perform his miracles. It is only the "wonderful pneuma" that makes the Spiritual Man unique. Granted that ZHUANG Zhou's language is metaphorical, however, it does suggest that self-cultivation, symbolized by dietary regimen, is necessary in order to

become a Spiritual Man. Only then can an ordinary person be empowered to “climb up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas” (Watson 1968: 33)—to maximize his inborn capacity and transcend himself above the common crowd.

Clearly, Guo Xiang’s understanding of spontaneous nature and inborn allotment is a lot more complicated than an elegant reiteration of the ideas in the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, he appeared to have contradicted himself as he tried to construct an intricate philosophy of life of his own. For Guo, self-so refers to the state of being, the process of becoming as well as their efficient cause. Commenting on the “Shanmu” 山木 (Outer) chapter, he said: “Whenever it is called heaven, it means [something happens] of its own accord without effort. This means self-so is just self-so. How can man have this self-so by making it so? It is self-so and nothing else, hence, it is called spontaneous nature” (凡所謂天，皆明不為而自然。言自然則自然矣，人安能故有此自然哉？自然耳，故曰性) (Guo 1985: 694).<sup>31</sup> The relationship between heaven and man was a fundamental concern in the *Zhuangzi* and tension is evident as the boundary between them is not apparent.<sup>32</sup> As ZHUANG Zhou put it,

Knowing what it is that Heaven does, he lives with Heaven. Knowing what it is that man does, he uses the knowledge of what he knows to help out the knowledge of what he doesn’t know, and lives out the years that Heaven gave him without being cut off midway—this is the perfection of knowledge.

However, there is a difficulty. Knowledge must wait for something before it can be applicable, and that which it waits for is never certain. How, then, can I know that what I call Heaven is not really man, and what I call man is not really Heaven? There must first be a True Man before there can be true knowledge.

知天之所為，知人之所為者，至矣。知天之所為者，天而生也；知人之所為者，以其知之所知以養其知之所不知，終其天年而不中道夭者，是知之盛也。

雖然，有患。夫知有所待而後當，其所待者特未定也。庸詎知吾所謂天之非人乎？所謂人之非天乎？且有真人而後有真知 (Guo 1985: 224; Watson 1968: 77).

The differentiation between heaven and man decides what is self-so and what is artificial effort, and knowledge is the key for ZHUANG Zhou. Only the True Man would have true knowledge required to negotiate the nebulous and fluid boundary between heaven and man. However, Guo Xiang took a different view and blurred, if not conflated, the boundary. He said: “Knowing that what Heaven *and* man do are equally self-so, one may then let go of one’s person from within and merge it with things from without, identifying oneself mysteriously with the multitude [of things]. When one lets this happen, there is nowhere that one cannot reach (知天人之所為者，皆自然也；則內放其身而外冥於物，與眾玄同，任之而無不至者也). (Guo 1985: 224). For Guo, heaven and man merge together in self-so; competence and effort are not casually linked but their dichotomy may collapse into identity. Indeed, man being one of the myriad things would interfuse with everything else as they also follow their own self-so. Man becomes free because he merges with the myriad

<sup>31</sup> Guo also said, “Heaven is what is called self-so” (天者，自然之謂也). See Guo 1985: 224.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, (Inner) Chapter 6 (“Da zongshi” 大宗師) and (Outer) Chapter 17 (“Qiu shui” 秋水).

things, unlike ZHUANG Zhou's Spiritual Man who stays aloof from the crowd and "climbs up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas."

Yet, it is not clear how competence and effort can become identical. Perhaps GUO might say that the collapse itself is also a matter of self-so, a coherence in the making, but that seems to beg the question about self-so. Nevertheless, things are bound to merge together, so the boundary between heaven and man—competence and effort—will always merge because even if what man does fail at first, he can self-correct, and self-correction itself constitutes the process of self-so realization as well. GUO explained: "Things in the world do not necessarily of their own accord bring themselves to completion; in the coherence of self-so, there are also things which require smelting to become utensils.... Follow one's spontaneous nature and go straightforward, this is self-so. If one harms one's spontaneous nature in so doing, one can correct [one's mistake]. This is also called self-so (天下之物,未必皆自成也,自然之理,亦有須冶鍛而為器者耳。.....夫率性直往者,自然也;往而傷性,性傷而能改者,亦自然也) (Guo 1985: 281). When self-correction is allowed as the functioning of self-so, self-cultivation becomes possible if not necessary and it does not compromise the self-so evolution of things. What appears jarring is that a "smelter" as a foreign agency may be needed in making self-cultivation successful. However, if, as GUO Xiang claims,<sup>33</sup> the "smelter" is actually a metaphor that refers to the myriad things that co-evolve with the thing being smelted, the apparent dichotomy would dissolve because the myriad things collectively constitute what he called "heaven."<sup>34</sup> Thus, man as a constituent of heaven naturally may self-correct in the process of his co-evolution with all other constituents. GUO said: "Things have their self-so, which cannot be made so by effort.... they are all what they are of their own accord. [Even] when things are made so, they also are such of their own accord (物有自然,非為之所能也.....皆不為而自爾。物有相使,亦皆自爾) (Guo 1985: 917). That being the case, self-correction is not performed by the thing in question itself; rather, it is an inevitable outcome of its mysterious interfusion together with everything else in its evolutionary odyssey—the same is true of everything else in the same interdependent nurturing process. In fact, if correction is self-motivated, the effort may not be successful all the time. GUO said: "Spontaneous interfusion without effort is called transformation. If it is made so by conscious effort, then it may be obstructed at times (不為而自合,故皆化,若有意乎為之,則有時而滯也) (Guo 1985: 613). His position on self-cultivation is

<sup>33</sup> GUO read the smelting in the original *Zhuangzi* text as an "allegory" (*jiyan* 寓言). See Guo 1985: 281.

<sup>34</sup> GUO said, "Heaven is the summatory name for the myriad things. Wherever a thing happens to be, it is its heaven. Who is there to make things serve him like a master? Thus, things engender themselves of their own accord and do not come from somewhere else. This is the way of heaven" (天者,萬物之總名也,莫適為天,誰主役物乎?故物各自生而無所出焉,此天道也). See Guo 1985: 50. Also see 20.33 where GUO said that self-so without effort is called heaven (凡所謂天,皆明不為而自然).

ambiguous at best. In any event, self-cultivation is discouraged because it is not only unnecessary but also potentially destructive.

## 4 Aloneness and Lone-Transformation

ZHUANG Zhou's model of self-cultivation is methodical and progressive with a well-defined goal, and it is best illustrated in the following dialogue:

Nanbo Zikui said to the Woman Crookback, "You are old in years and yet your complexion is that of a child. Why is this?"

"I have heard the Way!"

"Can the Way be learned?" asked Nanbo Zikui.

"Goodness, how could that be? Anyway, you aren't the man to do it. Now there's Buliang Yi—he has the talent of a sage but not the Way of a sage, whereas I have the Way of a sage but not the talent of a sage. I thought I would try to teach him and see if I could really get anywhere near to making him a sage. It's easier to explain the Way of a sage to someone who has the talent of a sage, you know. So I began explaining and kept at him for three days, and after that he was able to put the world outside himself. When he had put the world outside himself, I kept at him for seven days more, and after that he was able to put things outside himself. When he had put things outside himself, I kept at him for nine days more, and after that he was able to put life outside himself. After he had put life outside himself, he was able to achieve the brightness of dawn, and when he had achieved the brightness of dawn, he could see his own aloneness. After he had managed to see his own aloneness, he could do away with past and present, and after he had done away with past and present, he was able to enter where there is no life and no death. That which kills life does not die; that which gives life to life does not live. This is the kind of thing it is: there's nothing it doesn't send off, nothing it doesn't welcome, nothing it doesn't destroy, nothing it doesn't complete. Its name is Peace-in-Strife. After the strife, it attains completion."

夫卜梁倚有聖人之才而無聖人之道，我有聖人之道而無聖人之才，吾欲以教之，庶幾其果為聖人乎！不然，以聖人之道告聖人之才，亦易矣。吾猶守而告之，參日而後能外天下；已外天下矣，吾又守之，七日而後能外物；已外物矣，吾又守之，九日而後能外生；已外生矣，而後能朝徹；朝徹，而後能見獨；見獨，而後能無古今；無古今，而後能入於不死不生（Watson 1968: 82–83, romanization modified).

Self-cultivation requires a rigorous program (*dao* 道) which aims at minimizing exterior influence on the mind in five stages, from the world outside to things to the cultivator's own life. The progression is grounded upon the successful completion of each previous stage of cultivation. Each layer of the exterior cumbrances forms a companionship (*ou* 耦) with the mind, and when the mind is no longer impervious to the exterior including the physical welfare of the cultivator's own life, it cuts off all said companionships (*sangou* 喪耦).<sup>35</sup> Only then will it "achieve the brightness of dawn" (*zhaoche* 朝徹)—the inner light of the mind now shines through and illuminates within and without. When everything becomes transparent and the boundary between interior and exterior vanishes, the cultivator finally sees his aloneness (*jian du* 見獨) as if he were the only existence in the entire universe.

<sup>35</sup> Guo 1985: 43.

Indeed, he and the universe are finally one. Space and time are now void and the cultivator himself is beyond life and death.

As far as the cultivator is concerned, aloneness (*du* 獨) is the apotheosis of his self-cultivation, which empowers him to transcend time and space and lives always in the here and now. The expression *jian du*, seeing one's aloneness, is critical as it unequivocally states that aloneness is the goal to be pursued rather than an asset to work with at the onset. For ZHUANG Zhou, the cultivator's asset is the mind, which of course would be his liability if left alone or allowed to run wild.<sup>36</sup> The famous doctrine of mind-fasting in the "Renjianshi" chapter is virtually synonymous with his brand of self-cultivation. In the mouth of Confucius, the fasting of the mind is thus:

"Make your will one! Don't listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don't listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but pneuma is empty and ready to respond to all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind."

若一志，無聽之以耳而聽之以心，無聽之以心而聽之以氣！聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。（Guo 1985: 147; Watson 1968: 57–58, modified).

The control of the mind lies in one's will (*zhi* 志), which motivates and directs its activities. The mind of the True Man (*zhenren* 真人) is at his will's command (*qixin zhi* 其心志), only then can he look calm, "chilly like autumn, balmy like spring, and his joy and anger prevail through the four seasons. He goes along with what is right for things and no one knows his limit" (Guo 1985: 230–231; Watson 1968: 78). The will commands the mind to "lose its companionships" with external things,<sup>37</sup> "smash up one's limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make oneself identical with the Great Thoroughfare" (Guo 1985: 284; Watson 1968: 90). When the mind forgets the exterior, perceptual and intellectual knowledge is obviated. Still, the mind itself needs to be forgotten as well, only then will inner and outer become one in a unitary void and aloneness will emerge. This exercise of forgetting is called sitting-in-forgetfulness (*zuowang* 坐忘),<sup>38</sup> which apparently works in tandem with the fasting of the mind. And the accomplished cultivator will conduct himself accordingly as his pneuma moves in response to what comes his way.

Inspired by ZHUANG Zhou's idea of *du* (aloneness) and related ideas in the Outer and Mixed chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, GUO Xiang promoted his innovative idea of *duhua* (獨化 lone-transformation).<sup>39</sup> While aloneness is the target of arduous

<sup>36</sup> The "Qiwulun" chapter has an accurate and alarming description of the unmitigated damage the mind can do to us. See Guo 1985: 51.

<sup>37</sup> In the "Tiandi" 天地 (Outer) chapter mentions that there are ten things that the gentleman clearly comprehends in order to nurture the greatness of his mind, and one of them is "[t]o see that external things do not blunt the will is called perfection" (不以物挫志之謂完). See Guo 1985: 407; Watson 1968: 127.

<sup>38</sup> Guo 1985: 284.

<sup>39</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of Guo Xiang's idea of *duhua*, see Lo 2020: 367–392.



self-cultivation by one's conscious efforts, lone-transformation refers to a self-motivated yet non-conscious process of transformation which involves countless things along the way. They are fundamentally different and disparate. Solitary aloneness is the ultimate achievement of inner sagacity, and as such, it will have effective impact on things in the outer world as the "Ying diwang" chapter aims to demonstrate. In the "Zaiyou" 在宥 (Outer) chapter, when Cloud Chief sought advice from Big Concealment on self-cultivation, the latter replied in part:

Well, then—mind-nourishment! ... You have only to rest in inaction and things will transform themselves. Smash your form and body, spit out hearing and eyesight, forget you are a thing among other things, and you may join in great unity with the deep and boundless....

鴻蒙曰：意！心養。汝徒處無為，而物自化。墮爾形體，吐爾聰明，倫與物忘；大同乎溟涬…… (Guo 1985: 390; Watson 1968: 122).

Evidently, mind-nourishment is a program of self-cultivation that is essentially identical with the fasting of the mind and sitting-in-forgetfulness. More importantly, it also reveals the model of inner sagacity and outer kingliness. The phrase *zihua* (自化, to transform on its own) describes the cultivator's influence that causes things to transform themselves and does not have any peculiar philosophical import in its context. It appears again in the "Qiushui" 秋水 (Outer) chapter—the only other occurrence in the entire book of the *Zhuangzi*. It says:

"The life of things is a gallop, a headlong dash—with every moment they alter, with every moment they shift. What should you do and what should you not do? Everything will change of itself, that is certain!"

物之生也，若驟若馳，無動而不變，無時而不移。何為乎，何不為乎？夫固將自化 (Guo 1985: 585; Watson 1968: 182).

Here, no external agency is involved in the transformation of things but the quotation above intends to describe the phenomenal nature of things rather than express a philosophy of self-transformation. Regardless, it was this second usage that inspired Guo Xiang's doctrine of lone-transformation.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, Guo's usage of *zi hua* is basically synonymous with *duhua* and albeit little noticed, it also becomes a central concept in his commentary where it occurs nineteen times throughout the three clusters of chapters. For instance, he said: "He should be emperor or king who has no-mind and lets [things] transform themselves 夫無心而任乎自化者，應為帝王也" (Guo 1985: 287). For Guo, the adverb *zi* signifies the inherent force that drives a thing to auto-transform; in this sense, the motivating force, coming from within and nowhere else, is essentially the same as the sole impetus that sets a thing off to transform itself, even though it does not entirely determine its actual trajectory of evolution. On the other hand, while Guo understood the idiosyncratic meaning of *du* (aloneness) as a noun in the *Zhuangzi*, he opted to use it in the adverbial sense consistently in his commentary. Referring to the movements of the shadow, for instance, he commented: "This says it is [the shadow's] 'heavenly mechanism' [moving] by itself; it rests and rises non-dependently. Non-dependent, it accomplishes [its movements] by itself. Who knows

<sup>40</sup> In all fairness, Guo Xiang used *zi hua* as an adverbial phrase once. See Guo 1985: 832.



the cause? And why the penumbra would ask how it is so 言天機自爾，坐起無待。無待而獨得者，孰知其故，而責其所以哉” (Guo 1985: 111)? Semantically, *du de* (獨得) may be replaced with *zi de* (自得), but *du* was used here because GUO wanted to emphasize the independent, solitary status of the shadow, and he used *zide* as a noun throughout his commentary to refer to self-attainment, the outcome of lone-transformation.

For GUO Xiang, genesis (*sheng* 生) is causeless and the myriad things are auto-genetic. Transformation (*hua* 化), on the other hand, is a post-genesis process of development, and as the myriad things form an interconnected and boundless mesh, even though everything auto-transforms after their autogenesis—what GUO called auto-transformation or lone-transformation—their development necessarily implicates those of everything else in theory. Such interdependent co-development, in GUO’s terminology, is called intergrowth (*xiangyin* 相因)—a concept absent in the *Zhuangzi*. The best way for each entity to merge into and contribute to the intergrowth is to transform of its own accord, embracing any and all entities that may come its way and respecting their own auto-transformations—such is lone-transformation. As GUO put it: “The efficacy of intergrowth is best manifested in perfect lone-transformation. What man relies on is heaven and what heaven engenders is lone-transformation 夫相因之功，莫若獨化之至也。故人之所因者，天也；天之所生者，獨化也” (Guo 1985: 241). The totality of all entities is called heaven, and any individual human being within it is called man. As mentioned above, tension exists between heaven and man in the *Zhuangzi* and it appears that GUO Xiang tried to resolve it with his theory of lone-transformation in intergrowth.

In the kaleidoscopic universe of interdependent entities, what actually would converge together directly or indirectly in a co-evolution is a matter of chance called destiny (*ming* 命)—a condition about which nothing cannot be done (*buke naihe* 不可奈何) (Guo 1985: 156). Such a chance event is called encounter (*yu* 遇). Thus, the evolving destiny of an entity is, in reality, a continuous series of unpredictable encounters. In theory, as each encounter is auto-generated and impervious to exterior influences, there is no causal connection between encounters. However, it is not clear how man should or could negotiate with each encounter if he is powerless to make any difference to the next one in the continuous yet disjunctive series. We may accept GUO’s assertion that within a person’s life, which is not begotten by himself, there is not a personal ego or identity (*wo* 我) that accounts for everything he does and does not do, any knowledge, ability, feeling, and disposition he may or may not acquire, and of course, any encounter he may happen upon. It is simply the way things cohere together of their own accord (*li zier* 理自爾) (Guo 1985: 199–200). Nevertheless, it does not tell us *how* to let things auto-transform so that we may lone-transform ourselves in the co-evolution of intergrowth that is called our destiny (Guo 1985: 190).

Albeit rigorous and challenging, ZHUANG Zhou’s program of self-cultivation can be learned, and in this regard, knowledge is absolutely crucial and necessary. To be precise, it is “great knowledge” (*dazhi* 大知) which is void of discriminatory perception and intellect (*congming* 聰明); it is “broad and unhurried” (*xianxian* 閑閑)

and allows the mind to function like a mirror in response to the external world.<sup>41</sup> It requires the training of “smashing form and body and spitting out hearing and eyesight.”<sup>42</sup> GUO Xiang, however, did not address the issue of knowledge per se; instead, he glorified and mystified the functions and efficacy of knowledge, namely, how knowledge can help things forget themselves and interfuse with one another in their interaction and co-evolution. However, he did not elaborate *how* knowledge could be acquired in the first place, even though he admitted that knowledge is necessary. He said:

Mount on the true knowledge [of the horses] and ride on their self-so, one can arrive at the destination on a ten-thousand-mile journey without compromising the nature of the horses.

御其真知，乘其自然，則萬里之路可致，而群馬之性不失 (Guo 1985: 339).

Syntax dictates that both possessive pronouns *qi* 其 refer to the horses, and true knowledge and self-so refer to the same thing, namely, what is innate in the horses and comes naturally to them in response to any peculiar circumstance they happen upon. Thus, for the rider, it is necessary to know about the horses’ “true knowledge” and how they exhibit it in their situational behavior in order to ride them successfully on an expedition of ten thousand miles without compromising their spontaneous natures. This is intergrowth between the rider and the horse. Yet, how does the rider gain the knowledge about the horses and their spontaneous natures? GUO Xiang owes us an answer.

As mentioned, mind-nourishment is indispensable in ZHUANG Zhou’s theory of self-cultivation, and the physical body and perceptual and intellectual knowledge are deemed obstacles to be overcome. While several passages in the *Zhuangzi* mentioned this practice explicitly, GUO Xiang never once addressed it in his commentary. Instead, he invariably focused on the parts that describe the powers and effects of such cultivation (Guo 1985: 282–285; 390–392). On the episode about the fasting of the mind, he was silent on the different kinds of listening and their effects on the cultivator. Similarly, when ZHUANG Zhou took great pains to describe the internal struggles of the enclosed mind (*chengxin* 成心) trying to feed its ego and manipulate the world in the “Qiwulun” chapter, GUO’s commentary was uncharacteristically spare and dull, and lacked for insight. Clearly, he was not keen on the operation of the mind in self-cultivation. Perhaps, this is exactly what he himself lacked in his personal self-cultivation. In fact, he would even condemn using the mind at all as he proclaimed that the only way to nourish the mind is not to use it because it is harmful to do so (夫心以用傷，則養心者，其唯不用心乎) (Guo 1985: 390).

<sup>41</sup> Guo 1985:307.

<sup>42</sup> Regarding the cultivation of a comprehensive and all-inclusive vision of reality, ZHUANG Zhou recommended against “using one’s clarity. See Lo 1999.

## 5 Conclusion

Chinese philosophical terms are typically polysemous and this reflects the rich, complex, fluid and interchanging experiences that Chinese philosophers attempted to understand in their own persons, communities, personal lives and public duties as well as the myriad fellow beings and the universe they share together in a common destiny. Polysemy naturally lends itself to articulate idiosyncratic insights that cluster around a finite set of seemingly identical concepts. Doing philosophy is similar to cooking; every chef can cook up a signature dish with the same ingredients but distinctive flavor and garnishes. The analogy is particularly pertinent to the Chinese commentarial tradition where commentators would create out of the texts they explain and interpret. GUO Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi* is insightful and often explains the semantics and philosophical import of the text accurately, but he was not only a philosophic doppelgänger of ZHUANG Zhou. Under the resemblance and disguise of ZHUANG Zhou's philosophical vocabulary and language, he fashioned his own. While he was helpful in bringing the text of *Zhuangzi* to the eager reader in his time, the uninitiated can be easily led astray by his dazzling insights and lucid exposition, and will thus be alienated from ZHUANG Zhou. A spectacular philosopher in his own right, GUO Xiang broke new ground in *Xuanxue* and his profound insights foreshadowed much to come in Chinese philosophy such as the revival of Confucianism in the eleventh century. Calling him a mere commentator, and a bungling one at that, does not do justice to him or Chinese philosophy. WUZHOU Miaocong's apparently dismissive remark was, in fact, utterly astute; ZHUANG Zhou did write a commentary on GUO Xiang's new philosophy. Reverse commentaries were actually common in the Chinese commentarial tradition. As far as *Xuanxue* is concerned, ZHUANGZI was its most significant source of inspiration and GUO Xiang's faithfulness to and deviation from his philosophy as well as his personal integrity perhaps best illustrates *Xuanxue*'s inheritance from and creation out of earlier Daoist thought, for better or for worse.

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# Chapter 19

## The *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism



C. Lynne Hong

### 1 Introduction: Historical Background

Buddhism entered and was integrated into China between the first half of the first century BC and the middle of the first century CE.<sup>1</sup> Its process of transmission and integration was greatly facilitated by Daoist terminology, which had been prevalent in both elite circles and among laymen. Yet it is hard to pin down the initial stage of philosophically meaningful interaction between Buddhism and Daoism, including Zhuangzian thought.<sup>2</sup> We may be sure, nonetheless, that Buddhism had been philosophically intriguing and well-known to Chinese intellectuals by 320 CE,<sup>3</sup> when discussions and debates over Buddhism and Daoism occurred in the Qingtan 清談 (Pure Talk) movement held by the Chinese intellectual circle.

Qingtan discussions started after 220 CE and continued throughout the entire Jin 晉 Dynasty, which consists of the Western Jin (265–316) and Eastern Jin (317–420)

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<sup>1</sup>For a historical survey of Buddhism's entry into China, see Zürcher 1959: 18–23 and Bumbacher 2007: 203–205.

<sup>2</sup>By “meaningful interaction,” I mean conscious and philosophical communications between Buddhist and Zhuangzian thoughts, beyond Buddhist translational activity which borrows similar Daoist terms for the purpose of translation. More practical interaction must have happened during the infiltration of Buddhism into China, such as meditation techniques. For further discussions with regard to more practical interaction, see Bumbacher 2007 “Early Buddhism in China: Daoist Reactions,” in Heirman and Bumbacher 2007: 203–246.

<sup>3</sup>Please refer to the discussion by Zürcher on the formation of gentry Buddhism. By “gentry Buddhism,” he means “an intellectual clerical élite consisting of Chinese or naturalized foreign monks, creators and propagators of a completely sinicized Buddhist doctrine which from that time onward starts to penetrate into Chinese upper classes.” See Zürcher 1959: 71–72.

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periods. Qingtan can be seen as an intellectual movement or a mode of discourse with purely academic interests. The main philosophical current in the Qingtan movement was called “Xuanxue 玄學” (Dark Learning), which centered its discussions on the *Zhouyi* 周易 (also known as *Yi Jing* 易經, the *Book of Changes*), the *Laozi* 老子 (*Daodejing* 道德經) and the *Zhuangzi*.

No later than 317 CE, many intellectuals in the Qingtan movement were keen learners of Buddhism or Buddhist clergy proficient in both traditional Confucian and Daoist scriptures. The *Gaoseng Zhuan* 高僧傳 (*The Memoirs of Eminent Monks*) notes at least 17 Buddhist monks or laymen who mastered the *Zhuangzi*, some of whom had debated it with other scholars.<sup>4</sup> The *Shishuo Xinyu* 世說新語 (*A New Account of Tales of the World*) not only remarks on the prevalence of the *Zhuangzi* among the cultured upper classes but also presents how widespread and influential Buddhist sutras, temples, and sculptures were during that period.<sup>5</sup> Given the records of the Qingtan movement preserved in these works, it seems plausible that there was some level of interaction between Buddhist ideas and Zhuangzian thought, irrespective of whether these interactions took place in private or in public.

The most significant record of the interaction between the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism that we can find today are the notes concerning how Zhi Dun 支遁 (Zhi Daolin 支道林; 314–366), a Buddhist monk, impressed other Qingtan scholars through his comments on the *Zhuangzi*, in particular his opinions on the concept of *xiaoyao* 逍遙 “free and unfettered” and on “Xiaoyaoyou 逍遙遊”, the first chapter of the received version of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>6</sup> As his interpretation of *xiaoyao* was widely appreciated by contemporary Qingtan scholars, we may assume that his interpretation was not too far away from that of the Zhuangzians.

About two hundred years after Xuanxue, a notable philosophical movement called Chongxuanxue 重玄學 (*The Study of Twofold Mystery*) thrived in the Sui 隋 (581–619) and Tang 唐 Dynasties (618–907) and became particularly popular in the early seventh century.<sup>7</sup> As a philosophical current within religious Daoism, Chongxuanxue may be considered the first mature integration of the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism, due to its ingenious combination of the reasoning methodologies of both traditions.<sup>8</sup>

The name “chongxuan 重玄” gives prominence to the methodology of dual negation as a form of intellectual contemplation. SUN Deng 孫登, an intellectual active during the Eastern Jin,<sup>9</sup> was recognized as the source of “chongxuan” by

<sup>4</sup>Huijiao’s 慧皎 *Gaoseng Zhuan* is a historical biographical work on eminent Buddhist monks from the middle of the first century down to 519 CE.

<sup>5</sup>Liu Yiqing’s 劉義慶 *Shishuo Xinyu* is a collection of biographical and colloquial-language accounts regarding characters from the second to mid-fourth centuries CE.

<sup>6</sup>See the entries in “Literature 文學,” the fourth chapter of *Shishuo Xinyu*: 4.32, 4.36, and 4.55.

<sup>7</sup>Assandri 2009:1–3.

<sup>8</sup>Most modern scholars agree that Chongxuanxue is a current within philosophically religious Daoism which nevertheless owes a great debt to Buddhist reasoning methodology, particularly that from Mādhyamika thought. References, to name a few, are Fujiwara 1961b: 44–45, Kohn 2007 [1990]: 184–185, Lu 1997: 10, Sharf 2002: 65–71, Cheng 2006:157–159, and Assandri 2009:1–3.

<sup>9</sup>See Fujiwara 1961a: 21–26.

CHENG Xuanying 成玄英 (ca. 601–690),<sup>10</sup> a significant Chongxuanxue thinker in the Tang Dynasty. However, several scholars have pointed out that ZHI Dun, who greatly influenced SUN Deng, was the first monk to mention and praise the concept of “chongxuan.”<sup>11</sup> Indirectly, then, it would seem that ZHI Dun played some role in the formation of Chongxuanxue. Whether or not ZHI Dun’s idea of “chongxuan” is the same as that used by Chongxuanxue thinkers is a topic of debate.<sup>12</sup> What stands firmly, however, is that his use of “chongxuan” was during the 317–933 CE generally considered to be an abbreviation of *Laozi*’s “obscure upon obscure 玄之又玄” (*Laozi* chapter 1).<sup>13</sup>

Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414), a slightly later Buddhist thinker, employs “chongxuan” as a designation of nirvāṇa and associates it with the methodology of *Laozi*’s “to decrease and decrease again 損之又損” (*Laozi* chapter 48).<sup>14</sup> Due to its literal meaning of “double obscure” and Sengzhao’s reading of it as “double decrease,” “chongxuan” in Sengzhao’s time may have been connected with the method of dual negation whereby one achieves the ultimate state. This dual negation eventually became the main methodology of Chongxuanxue, where “dual” characterizes the sense of “unceasingly” and “negation” is understood as “surpassing of what comes before.”

Regardless of its similarity to some phrases found in the *Laozi*, the concrete methodology of dual negation, in the sense of continually surpassing, most likely drew upon early Daoist and Buddhist reasoning patterns which can be found in the *Zhuangzi*, its Xiang-Guo commentary and the *Prajñāpāramitā* genre of reasoning developed by Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250), particularly in his *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (hereafter, *MMK*). By taking a close look at this methodology of dual negation, we shall be able to see how the *Zhuangzi* worked together with Buddhism in shaping such a philosophical current as Chongxuanxue.

<sup>10</sup> According to QIANG Yu’s 強昱 research. See 2002: 212–214.

<sup>11</sup> References see ZHI Dun, “Preface of the parallel summary between *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* 大小品對比要鈔序,” in *A Compilation of Notes on the Translation of the Tripitaka* 出三藏記集 (T55: 55a), as well as his “Hymn of praise to Maitreya 彌勒讚” in *Expanded Collection for the Propagation of the Light* 廣弘明集 (T52: 197a).

<sup>12</sup> For an argument on the relation between SUN Deng and ZHI Dun, see Fuziwara 1961a: 21–26. The assumption that SUN Deng’s idea of chongxuan is influenced by ZHI Dun is widely accepted by modern scholars such as LU Guolong 盧國龍 (1994), QIANG Yu (2002) and CHENG Tsan-shan 鄭燦山 (2011). Based on this assumption, some scholars have further compared ZHI Dun’s usage of “chongxuan” with the methodology of Chongxuanxue. Fuziwara, however, believes that ZHI Dun’s usage of “chongxuan” differs from that of Chongxuanxue; and he hence disagrees with the claim made by CHENG Xuanying that SUN Deng, assuming his idea is similar to ZHI Dun’s, is the source of the methodology of Chongxuanxue. See Fuziwara 1961a: 26–29. Cheng adopts this viewpoint and thus agrees that the influence should be limited to the term only and not to its meaning. See Cheng 2011: 36–37.

<sup>13</sup> Quotations from and references to the *Laozi* are based on LOU Yulei 樓宇烈, 2008, *Collation and Annotation on Laozi Daodejing and Wang Bi’s 王弼 Commentary* 老子道德經注校釋.

<sup>14</sup> See Sengzhao’s “Nirvāṇa Is Nameless 涅槃無名論,” T45: 160b.



With an eye on their mutual philosophical contributions, I intend to investigate the differences between the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism via two shared topics: the pursuit of liberation and the methodology of dual negation. Apart from the *Zhuangzi*, I will refer to the early Buddhist canon, *Nikāya* in Pāli and *Āgamas* in Chinese, to compare their ideas of liberation. I will draw on Nāgārjuna's *MMK* for discussing how the later Daoist philosophical current named Chongxuanxue based its methodology of dual negation on both the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism.

## 2 Liberation: *Xiaoyao* and *Nibbāna*

The ancient Chinese rivals of Daoism and Buddhism, mainly Confucians, often criticize the former two not only for their lack of societal contribution but also for disrupting the social order. One of the criticisms is that both Buddhism and Daoism advocate liberation which seems to require one to renounce the world.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is fair to say that the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism care more about liberation or emancipation than about the socio-ethical norms with which Confucians are concerned. Perhaps it is this advocacy of liberation that motivated Confucians to group together and target Buddhism and Daoism, including the *Zhuangzi*, during the Tang Dynasty, when the religious power of the latter two prevailed among intellectuals as well as laymen.

The most representative concept of liberation in the *Zhuangzi* is “free and unfettered” 逍遙 *xiaoyao*.<sup>16</sup> Modern scholarship generally understands *xiaoyao* as a kind of psychological or spiritual freedom.<sup>17</sup> LIU Xiaogan, for example, identifies *xiaoyao* as “full detachment from earthly life, floating or flying in the kingdom of spiritual freedom, and the experience of being united with the universe, without any concern about and entanglements in everyday life.” (Liu 2015:195) Though Buddhism distinguishes several levels of liberation, it is *nibbāna* (Skt. *nirvāṇa*), the

<sup>15</sup> For example, HAN Yu 韓愈 (768–824) criticizes that the laws of Daoism and Buddhism require followers to “abandon your lord and subjects, leave behind your fathers and sons, to ban your ways of mutual nourishment so as to find what [they] called purity, stillness and *nirvāṇa*. 今其法曰：「必棄而君臣，去而父子，禁而相生養之道。」以求其所謂清靜寂滅者” (Han 1990 [1819]: 2502; my translation). After he demonstrates the benefit of the social network, he targets the Daoists and Buddhists and says: “Today, however, persons who wish to set their minds in order, thereby put themselves beyond the pale of the world and the country, thus destroying the natural constant (ties of mankind). Being sons, they do not treat their father like a father, and being subjects, they do not treat their ruler like a ruler.... 今也欲治其心，而外天下國家，滅其天常，子焉而不父其父，臣焉而不君其君....” Han 1990 [1819]: 2502; translation from Fung 1953: 410 (trans. by Bodde).

<sup>16</sup> References to the primary text of the *Zhuangzi* are made according to the *Zhuangzi* concordance published by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000 (infra. “ICS”).

<sup>17</sup> Ziporyn, for example, translates *xiaoyao* as “far-flung and unfettered.” See Ziporyn 2020: 8. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 sums up the term *xiaoyaoyou* as “describing a condition where the spirit attains free activities by virtue of liberation 形容精神由解放而得到自由活動的情形.” See Xu 1969: 393.

ultimate level of liberation, that is the goal of Buddhist spiritual practices as displayed in the Four Noble Truths.<sup>18</sup>

Be that as it may, we still need a more detailed account of how the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism compare on the issue of liberation. One way to compare them is to give positive accounts on both, that is, accounts that clarify what it is that one is liberated to; yet since both traditions hold that reality, as well as some concepts such as *nibbāna*, are ineffable, it is inherently problematic to give accurate positive accounts.<sup>19</sup> It may be equally justified to approach this inquiry by offering negative accounts, namely, accounts that clarify what one is liberated from. After all, the idea of liberation is motivated by a pressing concern. Giving negative accounts of their ideas of liberation shall to some extent reflect their main concerns.

*Nibbāna*, the ultimate liberation in Buddhism, literally means “extinguished”.<sup>20</sup> Similar to other types of liberation in early Buddhist scriptures, *nibbāna* represents an unbound, unchained, or unfettered state. The state that is liberated from can be detected from the Buddha’s primary concern—the Four Noble Truths: the truths (*saccāni*) regarding suffering (*dukkha*), the origin of suffering (*dukkha-samudaya*), the cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*), and the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gāminī-paṭipadā*).<sup>21</sup> All the noble truths concern suffering and its cessation. *Nibbāna*, most closely associated with the third truth, is the ultimate spiritual goal and denotes the extinction of suffering. We might also say that *nibbāna* denotes the state of liberation from suffering.

But what is suffering (*dukkha*)? Which suffering does the Buddha consider most problematic? And what is the degree of the “cessation of suffering”? According to the first noble truth, the most serious type of suffering is a set of sufferings which contains birth, aging, sickness, death and other life-related difficulties. All of these

<sup>18</sup> See below for a brief introduction to the Four Noble Truths.

<sup>19</sup> For a comparative research on the ineffability between the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism, see Wang 2003: 81–121, between Daoism and Buddhism, see Lin 2013: 108–142 and Yao 2015: 513–526.

<sup>20</sup> For detailed meaning(s) of *nibbāna*, see *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary* 1921–1925: 362–363.

<sup>21</sup> Though “suffering” cannot precisely express the complex meaning of the term “*dukkha*” (as in Pāli, or *duḥkha* in Sanskrit), it is a rather common translation for this term which I adopt for the sake of the general reader. On another note, as this section relies on Pāli canon to introduce the Buddhist view on liberation, I will refer to these terms in their Pāli rather than in their Sanskrit form. Several instances indicate the Four Noble Truths as the only concern of the Buddha. For example, *Madhyama Āgama* 中阿含經 (*the Collection of Middle-Length Discourses*) states that “innumerable good practices, all of them are governed and included in the Four Noble Truths. This is to say that the Four Noble Truths are the best in all practices. 無量善法, 彼一切法皆四聖諦所攝, 來入四聖諦中。謂四聖諦於一切法最為第一” (T1: 464b). *Majjhima Nikāya* also states: “*Pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave, etarahi ca dukkhañceva paññāpemi, dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ*. (Bhikkhus, both of formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering.” (MN 22.38, Trenckner/PTS I:140; Translation from Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi 2005: 234) Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi also think that we should consider this statement with *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 12:15/ ii. 17: “This statement should be read in conjunction with SN 12:15/ ii. 17, where the Buddha says that one with right view, who has discarded all doctrines of a self, sees that whatever arises is only *dukkha* arising, and whatever ceases is only *dukkha* ceasing.” (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi 2005: 1211–1212.)

can be imputed to the vigorous existence of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*): matter or body (*rūpakkhandha*), sensations or feelings (*vedanākkhandha*), perceptions (*saññākkhandha*), mental formations (*saṅkhārākkhandha*) and consciousness (*viññānakhandha*). Since these five aggregates account for the existence of living beings, no one in *samsāra*—the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth—can avoid existential suffering. In order to permanently avoid suffering, one would need to completely get rid of *samsāra*. For the Buddha, leaving *samsāra* is the real and stable happiness—such is the state to which *nibbāna* refers.

When it comes to the *Zhuangzi*, the object one is liberated from and what such liberation involves are not as unequivocal as one may think. There are five *Zhuangzi* passages in which the term *xiaoyao* appears (infra. “*xiaoyao* passages”). In these passages, *xiaoyao* denotes a kind of manner or attitude defined by the concept of *wuwei* 無為 (lit. no-doing). Below I present a table of keywords in these *xiaoyao* passages. Instead of picking up a quick and general definition of the concepts such as *xiaoyao* and *wuwei*, I would like to invite the reader to investigate in their meanings or connotations offered by the textual contexts (Table 19.1).

Table 19.1 [Overlapping keywords]

<i>Zhuangzi</i> Chapter	Ch. 1	Ch. 6	Ch. 14	Ch. 19	Ch. 28
Keywords	Xiaoyaoyou	Dazongshi	Tianyun	Dasheng	Rangwang
<i>xiaoyao</i>	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉
“no-doing” 無為 <i>wuwei</i>	☉	☉	☉	△ no-business 無事	△ What use would I have for the empire? 吾何以天 下為哉
“to meander” 彷徨	☉	☉		☉	
“forgetting one’s own liver and gall” 忘其肝膽		☉		☉	
“losing one’s own ears and eyes” 遺其耳目					
“authenticity” 真		☉	☉		
“the ones condemned by heaven” 天之戮民		☉	☉		
Confucius 孔子 or Ruists		Confucius	Confucius	SUN Xiu 孫休 <sup>a</sup>	Shun 舜 <sup>b</sup>

[☉ exact same phrase, △ similar phrase]  
<sup>a</sup> CHENG Xuanying 成玄英 states that SUN Xiu is a native of Lu 魯, a region famous for its Ruist scholars. See Guo 2004: 663.  
<sup>b</sup> Even though Shun himself is not a Ruist, he is definitely a noble figure who Confucius and other Ruists greatly admire, and he is hence a model of Ruism.

At least two phenomena are worth noticing. Firstly, *wuwei*, or its near-equivalent, “no-business” (*wushi* 無事), appears in all passages except for the passage in Chapter 28 of the *Zhuangzi*. Second, the passage that contains most of the overlapping keywords appears in Chapter 6 rather than in Chapter 1, “Xiaoyaoou.”

As the *xiaoyao* passage in Chapter 6 has the highest number of keywords and seems therefore most representative, I will start investigating the meaning of *xiaoyao* from this passage. I will focus on the following questions: first, is *xiaoyao* presented as an ideal or ultimate state or, put in more concrete terms, is the *xiaoyao* figure an ideal persona? Second, if *xiaoyao* is a kind of liberation, what exactly does it liberate from?

## 2.1 A Brief Investigation of the Xiaoyao Passage in Chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*

The passage in Chapter 6 attributes *xiaoyao* to three good friends and the people they represent: Zisanghu 子桑戶, Mengzifan 孟子反 and Ziqinzhang 子琴張 (ICS 6/18/9–28; hereafter, the “Zisanghu passage”). When Zisanghu died, Confucius sent his disciple Zigong 子貢 to assist at the funeral. Zigong was surprised to see the other two friends singing at the corpse, an act which he found to be ritually improper. Confucius later on explains to him that people like Zisanghu and his friends “roam outside the square (*you fang zhi wai* 遊方之外).” They are “*xiaoyao* in *wuwei* 無為 activities” and do not perform socially-sanctioned rituals. In contrast, people like Confucius and his disciples “roam inside the square (*you fang zhi nei* 遊方之內).” They only act in conformity to conventional rituals.

On this account, the square plays a role of demarcation, contrasting two kinds of figures:

Square	Figures	Actions or behavior
Inside	Confucius and his disciples	Performing social rituals in a conventional manner
Outside	Zisanghu and his friends	<i>Wuwei</i> in a <i>xiaoyao</i> manner

The difference between the figures inside and outside the square comes down to their being *confined or unconfined* by ordinary custom. In contrast to the insiders, the outsiders neither execute worldly rituals nor conform to social norms. Hence, *xiaoyao*, as a manner of the outsiders, can be understood as a mental state which is not confined by conventional norms.

The aspect of non-confinement is also suggested by the opening paragraph of the passage, which explains the criteria through which these three outside-the-square figures become good friends: “be[ing] together in their very *not* being together (*wu xiang yu* 無相與),” “do[ing] things for one another by *not* doing things for one another (*wu xiang wei* 無相為),”<sup>22</sup> “climb[ing] up to the heavens, wander[ing] in the

<sup>22</sup> These translations are adopted from Ziporyn 2009:46.

mists, and go[ing] whirling into the *infinite* (*wu ji* 無極),”<sup>23</sup> and “living their lives in mutual forgetfulness, *never* coming to an end (*wu suo zhong cong* 無所終窮).”<sup>24</sup> Noticeably, all these four qualities fits the “*wu*-form,” in Ames and Hall’s term, in containing the term “*wu* 無,” which is translated above as “not,” “never” and the negative prefix “in-”.<sup>25</sup> The latter two cases—*in*-finite and *never* coming to an end—indicate the quality of being unconstrained by space and time, respectively. Similarly, the former two cases—*not* being together and *not* doing things for one another—imply that the relationship and the interactions among these friends do not conform with customary definitions of ‘relationship’ or ‘interaction’. Thus, we may infer that the actions of these outside-the-square figures—that is, *wuwei*—contrast to those confined by, or deliberately in compliance with, conventional forms, modes, norms, and even space and time.<sup>26</sup> If, as the passage suggests, *xiaoyao* is an attitude adopted in *wuwei* activities, then its sense of “insouciance” might well be derived from “undefined”, “unconstrained,” and “unconformity” as connotations of *wuwei*. To conclude, *xiaoyao* can be understood as a mental state of detaching oneself from, and hence unbound by, customary forms and modes, social norms or conventional rituals, and even the notions of space and time.

Even though such a state of *xiaoyao* and outside-the-square behavior may sound extraordinary, the passage is hesitant to present the behavior of the outside-the-square figures as better or more ideal. By commenting that “outside and inside can never meet,”<sup>27</sup> the passage simply agrees that there are two kinds of people who have nothing in common. The most we can say is that those outsiders are unusual yet not necessarily superior. *Xiaoyao* is hence nothing more than an alternative manner that one may or may not attain.

<sup>23</sup> These translations are based on Graham 2001:89.

<sup>24</sup> The translation refers to Ziporyn 2020:59.

<sup>25</sup> These qualities constituted of *wu* just meet what Ames and Hall call “*wu*-form,” which they define as follows: “[the] *wu*-forms ...advocate a personal disposition that seeks to optimize relationships through collaborative actions that, in the absence of coercion, enable one to make the most of any situation.” Ames and Hall 2003: 48.

<sup>26</sup> We may be tempted by a primitive intuition to read literally “not being together” and “not doing things for one another,” as well as “living their lives in mutual forgetfulness,” and to propose that these three “friends” simply do not hang out with each other at all. This Zisanghu passage, however, does describe how they accompany each other in certain occasions, such as gathering together and “celebrating” Zisanghu’s death. Since such intuitive reading would not meet the authentic meaning of these *wu*-form criteria, we are compelled to pursue an alternative yet convincing understanding.

<sup>27</sup> “外内不相及.” ICS 6/18/18.

## 2.2 A Brief Investigation of Other *Xiaoyao* Passages

The term *xiaoyao* in Chapter 1 shares the sense of non-confinement and unconventionality with its use in the Zisanghu passage. It appears in a conversation between Zhuangzi and Huizi, in which Huizi criticizes Zhuangzi's words for being large and useless. He does so by drawing a parallel between Zhuangzi's words and a big tree of unworkable shape. In defense, Zhuangzi first challenges Huizi's criterion of usefulness; that is, whether or not a thing can be carved into standardized crafts. Zhuangzi then offers an alternative way to *use* the big tree by which the tree needs not to be carved yet is useful—planting it somewhere and having people wander around, *wuwei* at its side, or take naps beneath it in a *xiaoyao* manner.<sup>28</sup>

The difference between these two proposals hinges on carving and standardization. The passage suggests that one could make good use of something in a creative way so long as one discards the idea of carving it *into* a standard or norm. In contrast to Huizi's endeavor of making something (the tree) useful in a conventional way, *wuwei* and *xiaoyao* in Zhuangzi's proposal associate with wandering and taking naps. What do you do in wandering around a tree? Probably nothing in particular—"in particular" in the sense that the "things" are not done in conformity to any identifiable norm, patterns or purposes. *Xiaoyao* in this passage, similarly, can be seen as a manner liberated from conventional ways to deal with, or interact with, whatever you encounter such as an unworkable tree.

Noticeably, even if Zhuangzi seems more intelligent than Huizi, he is by no means portrayed as a supreme person. *Xiaoyao* in Chapter 1 is simply a manner resulting from acting creatively and unconstrainedly, and it can be adopted by anyone.

It is in the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and in the commentary tradition that *xiaoyao* is treated as a superior quality or as a quality of supreme persons only. The *xiaoyao* passages in Chapters 14 and 19, two of the Outer Chapters, clearly identify *xiaoyao* as part of the supreme people's activity or attitude, which can be understood in terms of the *wu*-form reading of Ames and Hall (2003).<sup>29</sup> The *xiaoyao* in Chapter 19 is specified as that supreme people "*xiaoyao* in *wushi* (lit. no-business) activities." In contrast to the struggle for reputation, *wushi* in this passage is a kind of activity which does not set up specific goals requiring particular or conventionally admired patterns and definitions. The *xiaoyao* in Chapter 14 is a character of the

<sup>28</sup> My reading here draws on Ziporyn 2009: 8. It is worth pointing out that Zhuangzi in this passage does not reject the idea of being useful. Quite to the contrary, he actually proposes to find out the use(s) of the tree and his words. Apart from self-preservation, Zhuangzi's proposal suggests a further use case of the tree—it offers a resting spot for people. Hence, the usefulness of the tree, and by extension his own words, touches on how to be useful to others. Moreover, as *xiaoyao* in this passage is not applied to the tree but to the people who rest beneath it, self-preservation is not the use case that is directly associated with being *xiaoyao*.

<sup>29</sup> ICS 19/52/20-21: [the way that ultimate person conducts himself 至人之自行,]...逍遙乎無事之業.

ancient supreme people and it is defined as *wuwei*.<sup>30</sup> If *xiaoyao*, as discussed above, is an attitude with which actions are performed, it refers here perhaps to the unconstrained manner of performing indeterminate and unconfined actions or deeds.

If there is indeed a difference in the value of *xiaoyao* between the Inner and Outer Chapters when it comes to supreme versus ordinary people, the *xiaoyao* in Chapter 28 occupies its own position in that it is ambiguous in this regard. In this passage, Shun wants to cede the empire to Shanjuan 善卷. Shanjuan refuses and explains that he is satisfied with his life; he “*xiaoyao* between heaven and earth 逍遙於天地之間” and his “heart and mind content with themselves 心意自得.”<sup>31</sup> He therefore finds no need for an empire. *Xiaoyao* in this passage is a state of psychological contentment. It is unclear whether or not Shanjuan is a supreme person; yet, the text obviously contrasts him with Shun, who is viewed as a sage in the Ruist tradition. *Xiaoyao* in this context at least represents a manner different from the Ruists’—which concerns governing, management and power.

### 2.3 *Xiaoyao in the Zhuangzi Commentary Tradition*

The *Zhuangzi* commentary tradition, or at least the part of which we have substantial textual sources, starts with XIANG Xiu 向秀 (ca. 227–272 CE) and GUO Xiang 郭象 (ca. 252–312 CE) (infra Xiang-Guo), whose interpretation of *xiaoyao* plays an important role in the Qingtan movement during the Wei-Jin era. In their interpretation, *xiaoyao* is the ultimate state in which one achieves, and is content with, one’s own innate character (*xing* 性).<sup>32</sup> A small bird fits a small forest while a big bird requires a bigger scope in which to fly. Since their positions match their respective capacities, both are satisfied and neither envies the other. It is the absence of envy, anxiety or ambition that comes with pursuing or longing for what others have that qualifies the mental state of *xiaoyao*. If one is not content with one’s own position and desires the belongings or positions of others’, then one is not *xiaoyao*. Understood in this way, *xiaoyao* denotes a mental state free from dissatisfaction, especially the dissatisfaction with one’s current conditions. Everyone can, and should, attain such a state of *xiaoyao*, thereby making each supreme in his/her own right. In Xiang-Guo’s reading, there is no relative superiority or inferiority between the *xiaoyao* states of any two things, regardless of how different these things may be.

Such an understanding of *xiaoyao* was widely recognized within the Qingtan circle until it was challenged by ZHI Dun. Zhi presents the *xiaoyao* state as a mental state of supreme people who have attained *xiaoyao* through self-cultivation and who

<sup>30</sup> It says: “The utmost men of old.....to roam in the emptiness where one rambles without a destination,..... To ramble without a destination is Doing Nothing 古之至人, .....以逍遙之虛.....逍遙, 無為也.” (ICS 14/39/27–28; translation refers to Graham 2001: 129–130).

<sup>31</sup> ICS 28/81/16–17; the translation is based on Ziporyn 2020: 229.

<sup>32</sup> The translation of “*xing* 性” in Xiang-Guo’s commentary refers to Ziporyn 2009: 129.



are hence distinct from ordinary people.<sup>33</sup> In other words, *xiaoyao* is an achievement instead of an innate trait. Such a mental state is the result of releasing one's attachments to things and of freeing oneself from the persistence of fixed ways of doing things. These two aspects can be captured in a *wu*-form: the quality of being unconstrained by habitual patterns, be it our own or those of our community. Framed in this way, we can see Zhi's position as a further development which combines the *wu*-form and the ultimate nature of *xiaoyao* from the Inner and Outer Chapters. It is also undeniable that both Xiang-Guo and Zhi put more emphasis on desire and attachment than the *Zhuangzi* does. In the *Zhuangzi*, the *wu*-form of *xiaoyao* mainly contrasts with our patterned dealings with things and affairs. In Xiang-Guo's and Zhi's interpretation, the *wu*-form targets more our desires or attachments to things.

## 2.4 *Xiaoyao in Modern Zhuangzi Scholarship*

Modern scholarship often presents *xiaoyao* as a feature of the supreme person whose main characteristic is his lack of ego. Such an interpretation often starts with the assumption that although we are all limited by physical form and personal conditions, some of us can make our mind or spirit roam without limits in a transcendent realm.<sup>34</sup> In this light, *xiaoyao* is commonly regarded as the carefree mental state of the supreme person whose spirit roams beyond the ordinary world and enters into a union with the entire universe.<sup>35</sup> It is also considered equivalent to the state of no-self 無己 or loss-of-oneself “吾喪我 (lit. “I have lost myself”).<sup>36</sup> In order to achieve this kind of state, one needs to go through self-cultivation, which includes the practices of fasting the heart-mind 心齋 and sitting in disregard 坐忘.<sup>37</sup> These practices are considered helpful for disregarding the limitations set by our physical form and personal circumstances. When one reaches the state of *xiaoyao*, thus becoming a supreme person and being united with the Dao or the entire universe, one is in a position to equalize both the myriad things and worldly opinions (*qiwu* 齊物 or *qi wulun* 齊物論). In this way, one frees oneself as well as others from judgment and discrimination.

<sup>33</sup> Zhi says, “speaking of *xiaoyao*, it is what clarifies the supreme people's mind. [The supreme people...] treat things as things and are not treated as things by things; in that case, [they] are far reached and do not attain ego. [They] respond secretly yet do not act; they are not hasty yet fast; in that case, they are carefree yet there is nowhere they cannot arrive. This is how they are *xiaoyao*. 夫逍遙者，明至人之心也。.....物物而不物於物，則遙然不我得；玄感不為，不疾而速，則逍遙然靡不適。此所以為逍遙也。” (Quoted by Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 in *Shishou Xinyu* 4.32)

<sup>34</sup> For example, Liu 2015: 195, Deng 2010: 154–155.

<sup>35</sup> Liu 2010: 350; 2015:195.

<sup>36</sup> We can see similar opinions in Xu 1969: 395, Fang 1993: 247–248, Chen 2009, to name a few. “lost-of-oneself” appears in *Zhuangzi* chapter 2; ICS 2/3/16. “no-self” can be found in the *Zhuangzi* chapters 1, 11, and 17; ICS 1/2/2, 11/28/32, and 17/44/19.

<sup>37</sup> The passage on “heart-mind fast” appears in *Zhuangzi* chapter 4; ICS 4/10/1–9. That on “sitting in disregard” is from *Zhuangzi* chapter 6; ICS 6/19/17–22.

According to the scholarship just described, *xiaoyao* requires a transformation into a world or life very different from the present one. Assuming a mind-body contrast, it proposes the acceptance of physical limitation and the removal of intellectual discrimination so as to gain spiritual—not physical—freedom. Even though *xiaoyao* has a liberating effect, it puts greater emphasis on intellectual reflection than on the affordances of our conditions or abilities.

## 2.5 A Comparison Between Xiaoyao and Nibbāna

At the beginning of our investigation into *xiaoyao*, we asked two questions: one about the object from which one is liberated and the other about whether or not *xiaoyao* is the ultimate state. We may now answer these two questions and see the differences between the notion of liberation in Buddhism and the *Zhuangzi*.

First, the question about what it is that *xiaoyao* liberates one from. Via its association with *wuwei*, *xiaoyao* in the *Zhuangzi* can be understood as a manner of being free from determinate, definite or inflexible habitual patterns in thought and action, including our judgments, values, ways of dealing with things and our opinions towards life and death. Such traits locate *xiaoyao* in earthly life rather than outside of it, as Buddhist liberation would hold.

In answering our second question, we may divide the Zhuangzian notion of *xiaoyao* into two kinds: the Inner Chapters characterize *xiaoyao* as an unconstrained mindset which can be attained by anyone, while the Outer Chapters, commentaries and modern scholarship identify *xiaoyao* as a spiritual achievement of supreme people. The two *xiaoyao* passages in the Inner Chapters propose *xiaoyao* as an alternative way of conducting one's life; it is characterized by an unconventional style of thinking which is valued but perhaps not necessarily required. On the other hand, in the Outer Chapters as well as in the classical commentaries and modern scholarship, *xiaoyao* becomes part of an ideal way of being. Though these later works also present different shades of *xiaoyao* as a supreme feature, their common view is that *xiaoyao* is a quality that one ought to achieve.

For Buddhism, at least early Buddhism as represented by the *Āgamas* and the *Nikāya* canons, ultimate liberation, *nibbāna*, refers to the state where no suffering could ever arise. Hence, liberation is complete liberation from all suffering. As the suffering of living beings, moreover, is due to the circle of *samsāra*, to liberate from suffering is to liberate from *samsāra*. Anyone who attains such liberation attains the ultimate state of Buddhism. And it is a pursuit that everyone ought to conduct.

For the *Zhuangzi*, however, life itself and any possible afterlife or next life is never a problem to be solved. *Xiaoyao* focuses on matters of the here and now, especially our habitual patterns of thinking, evaluating and dealing with things, including our attitude towards life and death. Regarding the issue of life and death, several passages in the *Zhuangzi* challenge both the fear of death and its counterpart, the attachment to life. One of the passages describes life and death as a cycle, running

sequentially as the four seasons do (ICS 18/48/9–13). Another passage specifically renders life and death as the coming-together and scattering of *qi* 氣, be it a spirit or an invisible and formless matter (ICS 22/60/15–17). These two passages indicate a metaphysical dimension to the Zhuangzian notion of life and death: life and death run cyclically as parts of a natural process; after death, the *qi* which previously constitutes a life form may be temporarily scattered until it once more gathers, perhaps combines with other *qi* and shapes into another form as a new life.

It is not difficult to see a sense of rebirth in the *Zhuangzi* passages. What differentiates the *Zhuangzi* from Buddhism is that the former accepts life, death, possible rebirth and sufferings as part of life's destiny.<sup>38</sup> The latter, however, pursues the complete cessation of suffering, including forms of life. To be, or not to be, is never a question to the *Zhuangzi*. Nor is the *Zhuangzi* concerned with higher versus lower forms of life. Rather, it is the way we live or evaluate our life that matters. Hence, whatever it is that *xiaoyao* liberates us from, it is not life itself. Yet, this does not mean that we should simply be content with our present conditions. Instead, many passages in the *Zhuangzi* do remind us not to confine ourselves to the judgment, consent, or evaluation that our communities, our circles, and even we ourselves render upon us. They encourage us to open our minds to discover all kinds of possibilities in life and to make something constructive out of it.

Both the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism seem to prefer to leave the world; yet they mean different things by “leaving” and “the world:” the *Zhuangzi* favors being free from earthly concerns but *not* from the world or the cycle of life itself. The “world” that the Buddha suggests to leave, on the other hand, is *samsāra*, the endless cycle of life and death. That is to say, the *Zhuangzi* does not mind existing in this world while Buddhism does.

### 3 Methodology: *Zhuangzi* and MMK's Influence on Chongxuanxue

#### 3.1 *Chongxuan Style: The Reasoning Methodology of Chongxuanxue*

Chongxuanxue, The Study of Twofold Mystery, is a philosophical current within religious Daoism, which successfully integrates the reasoning methodologies of the earlier Buddhist and Daoist traditions. Indicative of its own methodology

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<sup>38</sup> A noteworthy statement from the *Zhuangzi* is “to understand what you can do nothing about and to be content with it as with fate—this is the perfection of virtue. 知其不可奈何而安之若命，德之至也” (ICS 4/10/21; translation from Watson 1968: 60). Liu Xiaogan singles out “[living] within naturally given situations 安命論,” as the first of three dimensions in his reconstruction of *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy. In his view, Zhuangzi accepts the inevitability of the naturally given situations and human haplessness, including the “circumstances of humiliation or glorification, poverty or prosperity, life and death, etc..” (Liu 2015: 197) See Liu 2010: 142–150 and 2015: 197–201.

(henceforth, “Chongxuan style”), the term “Chongxuan 重玄” (twofold mystery) is an abbreviation of *Laozi*’s “mysterious upon mysterious 玄之又玄” (*Laozi* 1) and was associated with the phrase “to decrease and decrease again 損之又損” (*Laozi* 48) no later than Sengzhao’s writing.<sup>39</sup> As a result of this double reference to the *Laozi*, there are two dimensions to the meaning of “Chongxuan” as used by Chongxuan thinkers: following the context of *Laozi* 1, “Chongxuan” sometimes denotes the ultimate state of Dao and of the sages who attain Dao; following *Laozi* 48, “Chongxuan” also connotes the reasoning methodology which requires one to continually discard one’s previous opinions or standpoints. These two senses of “Chongxuan” complement each other: the state of Dao is the state wherein one surpasses all fixed understanding or attachments; the methodology is instrumental in reaching this state.

Even though the term “Chongxuan” has its origin in the *Laozi*, the above meaning and methodology are generally considered to have been further developed and influenced by Buddhist Madhyamika and Daoist philosophy, especially the Zhuangzian tradition. The most representative Chongxuan thinker, CHENG Xuanying, for example, employs the terminology and reasoning forms of Daoist as well as Buddhist traditions in his exegeses of the *Daodejing* and *Nanhua zhenjing* 南華真經 (i.e. *Zhuangzi*). In his works, we can see the marks of both Madhyamika *catuṣkoṭi*(ka) (lit. four-cornered logic) and what he regards as Zhuangzian forms of dual dispelling 雙遣 and twofold forgetfulness 兼忘. In the following pages, we will investigate how these two traditions work together to form CHENG Xuanying’s methodology. We will do so by comparing his methodology with that of the *Zhuangzi*, its Xiang-Guo commentary and *MMK*, the representative work of *catuṣkoṭi* authored by Nāgārjuna.

### 3.2 A Comparison of Dual Negation Methodology Between *MMK*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Zhuangzi Commentaries by Xiang-Guo and CHENG Xuanying*

Let us start with the similarities. First, all works share a similar form of reasoning. A form which can be succinctly summed up in one phrase: “dispelling and dispelling again (*qian zhi you qian* 遣之又遣),” as used by Xiang-Guo and Cheng.<sup>40</sup> By ‘dispelling’, they mean a negation which overturns a proposition by proposing its opposite. This step can be regarded as the first dispelling (*qian*). Yet the methodology and movement of negation do not end at this stage of two-sided positions. The second ‘dispelling’—“dispelling again (*you qian*)”—illustrates a further negation which eliminates the second proposition not by falling back to the first but by

<sup>39</sup> See the first section of this paper.

<sup>40</sup> Quotations and discussions of Xiang-Guo and Cheng are based on Guo 2004: 79–81.

moving forward to a third proposition. Such negation continues until no further position remains. And it leads to at least a fourth position in addition to the other three.

Despite this similar reasoning style, there are pertinent differences between Nāgārjuna’s *MMK*, the Buddhist, on the one hand, and the Daoist tradition of the *Zhuangzi* and Xiang-Guo commentary, on the other. These differences allow us to see how the *Zhuangzi* and Buddhism contribute toward the reasoning methodology of Chongxuanxue, represented by Cheng.

In the following pages, I will examine Cheng’s exegesis of the statement “belonging in a category and not belonging in that category together form a single category 類與不類，相與為類” in the *Zhuangzi* (infra. “category paragraph”).<sup>41</sup> Cheng lays out the Chongxuan style by following the Xiang-Guo commentary, which explicitly takes ‘dispelling and dispelling again’ as reasoning rule and the succeeding lines of the *Zhuangzi* as examples of this rule.<sup>42</sup> These succeeding lines can be divided into a reflection on time and a reflection on things; or, to be more specific, reflections regarding the beginning of time and the existence of things. In my analysis, I will focus on the reflection regarding the existence of things because it takes a rather more complete form which lends itself better to a comparison with Nāgārjuna’s *catuṣkoṭi* as displayed in *MMK*.

For ease of comparison, I will refer to sources and statements as below.

statements textual sources	the first	the second	the third	the fourth
<i>Zhuangzi</i> : The category paragraph	Zz (1)	Zz (2)	Zz (3)	Zz (4)
Xiang-Guo commentary on the category paragraph	XG (1’)	XG (2’)	XG (3’)	XG (4’)
CHENG Xuanying exegesis on the category paragraph	Ch (1’')	Ch (2’')	Ch (3’')	Ch (4’')
Nāgārjuna’s <i>MMK</i> 18.8	<i>MMK</i> (I)	<i>MMK</i> (II)	<i>MMK</i> (III)	<i>MMK</i> (IV)

<sup>41</sup> Despite the relative ubiquity of the Chongxuan style in Cheng’s works, it is rare to see a *Zhuangzi* paragraph followed by Xiang-Guo and Cheng with a similar form, besides *this* paragraph. I focus on this paragraph of the *Zhuangzi* and its related commentaries from Xiang-Guo and Cheng particularly because this paragraph is the most representative case which lends itself to a comparison with *MMK* 18.8.

<sup>42</sup> This section of the *Zhuangzi* is where Xiang-Guo and Cheng specify their principle of “dispelling and dispelling again,” which in further passages appears to share a similar form to Nāgārjuna’s *catuṣkoṭi*. The primary text of the *Zhuangzi* is: “Now I will try some words here about “this.” But I don’t know if it belongs in the same category as “this” or not. For belonging in a category and not belonging in that category themselves form a single category! Being similar is so similar to being dissimilar! So there is finally no way to keep it different from “that.” 今且有言於此，不知其與是類乎？其與是不類乎？類與不類，相與為類，則與彼無以異矣。” (ICS 2/5/17-18; translation is from Ziporyn 2009:15.)

### 3.2.1 The Four Statements in the *Zhuangzi*

In the category paragraph, the *Zhuangzi* questions the idea of the existence of things in the following manner:

There is being. There is nonbeing. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-be-nonbeing. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-not-yet-beginning-to-be-nonbeing. Suddenly there is nonbeing. But, as for being and nonbeing, I do not-yet know which is really being and which is nonbeing.<sup>43</sup>

Taking this paragraph as an example of the reasoning form under discussion, we may see ‘being’ in the first sentence as Zz (1) *A*, and ‘nonbeing’ in the second sentence as Zz (2)  $\bar{A}$ , which is a negation of *A*. The long phrase in the third sentence can then be viewed as Zz (3) not-yet-beginning-to-be  $\bar{A}$ , a negation of  $\bar{A}$  achieved by postulating a time before nonbeing. The fourth sentence, Zz (4), then comes up with a negation of Zz (3) by adding another ‘not-yet-beginning-to’ to it. The final line summarizes the reasoning progress by questioning whether or not, in the final analysis, there really are *A* and  $\bar{A}$ , that is, whether or not there are indeed oppositions.

### 3.2.2 The Four Statements in the Xiang-Guo Commentary

The Xiang-Guo commentary takes *Zhuangzi*’s phrase ‘not-yet-beginning-to’ as an indicator of a more developed mental state in a process of self-cultivation. For Xiang-Guo, both Zz(1) and Zz(2) are signs that one still dwells in the framework of “this/right 是” and “not-this/wrong 非” and does not know about the negation of this framework in XG(3’). Yet, XG (3’) is still a form of “knowing;” to consciously negate a framework is a sign that the framework is still present in one’s mind. XG(4’) is a further level in the process of self-cultivation where one totally forgets ‘knowing’ about the framework (都忘其知) and hence achieves a state of complete nothingness 了無. The transition from XG(3’) to XG(4’) is what Xiang-Guo calls ‘*wuxin* 無心,’ a process of dispelling until there is nothing left to dispel, not even awareness of the distinction between ‘this/right’ and ‘not-this/wrong.’ As such, the Xiang-Guo commentary accentuates the reasoning methodology behind the four statements from the *Zhuangzi* in terms of ‘this/right’ and ‘not-this/wrong.’ This provides later Chongxuan scholars such as Cheng with the tools to develop their Chongxuan style in competition with their Buddhist counterparts.

<sup>43</sup> The primary text is as follows: “有有也者，有無也者，有未始有無也者，有未始有夫未始有無也者。俄而有無矣，而未知有無之果孰有孰無也。” (ICS 2/5/18-20). I consulted with Mair 1994:18 and Ziporyn 2009: 15 for the translation.

### 3.2.3 The Four Statements in CHENG Xuanying's Exegesis

Similar to the *Zhuangzi* and Xiang-Guo, Cheng's reasoning style also has a sense of process where the latter statement is always a negation of the previous line. The difference between his exegesis and the Xiang-Guo commentary is that Cheng reads the *Zhuangzi* statements as questions and hence negations to whatever is mentioned. For instance, he interprets Zz(1) as a negation, rather than an affirmation, of being (*you* 有). That is to say, Cheng considers the first step Ch(1'') a negation of Zz(1), which in theory amounts to nonbeing (*wu* 無)—Zz (2) or XG (2'). Ch (2'') "dispelling nonbeing 遣於無," as it entails Ch (1'') negation of being, is a bi-negation of being and nonbeing and should hence be understood as neither being nor nonbeing. Ch (2'') is similar to XG (3') in the sense that it also negates the dichotomous framework. Ch (3'') "dispelling the bi-negation [of being and nonbeing] 遣非[有非無]," as negating its previous statement, amounts to Zz (4)/XG (4'). Just as XG (3'), the negation applied in Ch (3'') negates the negation movement of Ch (2'') without falling back to Ch (1''). Finally, different from the cases in the *Zhuangzi* and the Xiang-Guo commentary, Ch (4'') presents a further negation: dispelling the negation of the bi-negation of being and nonbeing (遣非[非有]非無), which characterizes the typical Chongxuan style: dispelling and dispelling again.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.2.4 *Catuṣkoṭi* in Nāgārjuna's *MMK* 18.8

Cheng's reasoning configuration is said to be similar to the Buddhist Madhyamika *catuṣkoṭi*, called '*si ju* 四句' in Chinese Buddhist scriptures.<sup>45</sup> *Koṭi* means "corner"; *catuṣkoṭi* defines four, and thus all, possible positions in logical space and is variously referred to as "tetralemma" (e.g. Garfield and Priest 2003), "four alternatives" (e.g. Jayatilleke 2008 [1963]; Wayman 1977), or "four-cornered logic (*catuṣkoṭika*, *si ju lun fa* 四句論法)" (e.g. Inada 1993: 113; Kalupahana 1991 [1986]: 270). This heterogeneity in translation reflects different understandings of the term: "Tetralemma" takes each *koṭi* as a proposition, thus arriving at four propositions, while "four alternatives" or "four-cornered (logic)" also leaves room for

<sup>44</sup> At first sight, the text seems to imply that Ch (3'') and Ch (4'') are both negations of "nonbeing 無." Yet, further down in Ch (4''), we find that "*fei wu* 非無 (lit. negation of nonbeing)" and "*fei you wu* 非有無 ([bi-]negation of being and nonbeing)" are used interchangeably in Cheng's argument. When read in parallel to similar lines elsewhere in Cheng's exegesis, it becomes clear that "*fei you wu* 非有無" is actually "*fei you fei wu* 非有非無 (neither being nor nonbeing)." Hence, Ch (3'') "*qian fei wu* 遣非無 (lit. dispelling the negation of nonbeing)", i.e. the object of negation in Ch (4'') "*fei fei wu* 非非無," shall be the "negation of the bi-negation of being and nonbeing."

<sup>45</sup> Yu, Kohn, and Assandri render Cheng's Chongxuan style "tetralemma" and associate it with Madhyamika thought. For references, see Yu 2000: 123–161 (Chapter 5), Kohn 2004[2000]: 366–367, and Assandri 2009: 95–97. Examples of '*si ju*' can be found in Jizang's 吉藏 (CE 549–623) *The Profound Meaning of Three Treatise*, T45: 2c, 5c, 6a, 10a, 12b–c, etc..



understanding the four positions as discrete functions of a single proposition.<sup>46</sup> Both interpretations work, in my opinion, for the cases of *catuskoṭi* in *MMK*. For the sake of comparing *catuskoṭi* with the aspect of negation in the Daoist tradition, I will refer to *catuskoṭi* as “four alternatives” in this paper.

The most obvious *catuskoṭi* structure can be found in the eighteenth chapter of *MMK*, verse 8 (infra. *MMK* 18.8), where Nāgārjuna applies *catuskoṭi* to present the Buddha’s teaching strategy:

*Sarvaṃ tathyaṃ na vā tathyaṃ tathyaṃ cātathyaṃ eva ca,  
naivātathyaṃ naiva tathyaṃ etad buddhānuśāsaṃ.* (*MMK* 18.8)

Everything is genuine or not genuine, both genuine and not genuine, neither not-genuine nor genuine: this is the Buddha’s teaching.<sup>47</sup>

This verse consists of the following configuration:

*MMK* (I) *A* (everything is genuine / *sarvaṃ tathyaṃ*),

*MMK* (II)  $\bar{A}$  (everything is not genuine / *sarvaṃ na tathyaṃ*),

*MMK* (III) conjunction of *A* and  $\bar{A}$  (everything is both genuine and not genuine/ *sarvaṃ tathyaṃ cātathyaṃ eva ca*), and

*MMK* (IV) bi-negation of *A* and  $\bar{A}$  (everything is neither not-genuine nor genuine/ *sarvaṃ naivātathyaṃ naiva tathyaṃ*)

In terms of the formulation of negation, *MMK* 18.8 is very similar to the above examples from the *Zhuangzi*, Xiang-Guo and Cheng: *MMK* (I) is an affirmative, whereas *MMK* (II) is its negation. Since *MMK* (III) is a negation of the “either...or” relation between *MMK* (I) and *MMK* (II), it is close to XG (3’), which negates the previous two positions. *MMK* (IV) is a negation of *MMK* (III), as Zz (4), XG (4”) and Ch (4”) negate their previous statements.

<sup>46</sup> For an overall explanation, see Ruegg 2005 [1977]: 246–252. For a recent comprehensive study on *catuskoṭi*, see Priest 2018, particularly Chapters 4 and 5. The configuration of the *catuskoṭi* understood as a set of four propositions would be as follows: given a subject *S*: 1. *S* is *A*; 2. *S* is  $\bar{A}$ ; 3. *S* is both *A* and  $\bar{A}$ ; 4. *S* is neither *A* nor  $\bar{A}$ . The configuration of the *catuskoṭi* understood as a set of four discrete functions of a proposition is: given a proposition *P*, there are four possibilities: 1. affirmation; 2. negation; 3. both affirmation and negation; 4. neither affirmation nor negation.

<sup>47</sup> The Sanskrit text is based on Kalupahana 1991: 269. For the English translation, I have consulted Ruegg 2005 [1977]: 217, Saigusa 1985: 526, Inada 1993: 115, Kalupahana 1991: 269, and Garfield 1995: 250. For the translation of “*tathya*,” I follow Wayman’s rendering of the term as “genuine” for a twofold reason: First, “*tathya*” relates to “truth” and hence contains the meaning of “(being) true”; Second, other common translations, such as “such,” “so,” and “real,” though also valid, are relatively vague for a reader who knows little about Buddhism, particularly Madhyamika philosophy. Wayman argues that *catuskoṭi* is a disjunctive system and therefore translates this verse by adding “or” between all propositions. I do not follow him in translating this verse disjunctively because the necessary word in forming a disjunctive system—“or/ *vā*”—only appears once, between (I) and (II), and because the validity of *MMK* 18.8 does not necessarily require a disjunctive reading. See Wayman 1977: 6–10.

### 3.2.5 Daoist and Buddhist Influences on the Chongxuan Style

With respect to the methodology of dual negation, for which the Chongxuan style is famed, the aforementioned cases from the *Zhuangzi*, its Xiang-Guo commentary, Cheng's exegesis, and *MMK* 18.8 all display four positions in which the latter position always negates the former. Moreover, their third positions can all be read as negating the dichotomic framework(s) presented by the first two positions, be it the dichotomy of being/nonbeing or right/wrong. In addition, all fourth positions can be considered as the final, or the highest, position, which is closest to the truth, if any.

If we go further into the details, however, the negation formulae of these four texts do differ in significant ways. First of all, even though Cheng claims that his fourth position is 'dispelling the negation of the [bi-]negation of being and nonbeing 遣非非有無,' he somehow rephrases his description of *Dao* as the 'negation of the [bi-]negation of being and nonbeing 非非有無,' and 'neither being nor nonbeing 非有非無,' obviously applying the "neither...nor..." form of *MMK* (IV).<sup>48</sup> By not adopting terms such as 'not-yet-beginning 未始' (*Zhuangzi*) or 'forgetting 忘' (Xiang-Guo) but applying the form of 'neither...nor' and the terms of 'negation (非 or 遣),' 'being,' and 'nonbeing,' Cheng incorporates the form of *catuṣkoṭi* into his dual negation methodology.

Second, *catuṣkoṭi* generally display the four alternatives as "mutually exclusive and together exhaustive" (Jayatilleke 1967: 70).<sup>49</sup> Mutual exclusiveness involves an inter-negation that draws upon the dual negation methodology of the *Zhuangzi* as seen in the category paragraph, its Xiang-Guo commentary, and the Cheng exegesis. However, we should also heed attention to *catuṣkoṭi*'s other feature, the feature of exhaustiveness: the four alternatives, considered together, list all imaginable logical positions. This exhaustive character of *catuṣkoṭi* is not found in the *Zhuangzi*, its Xiang-Guo commentary and the Cheng exegesis. In fact, the dual negation principle of the Daoist writings may lead to an infinite regression wherein the reasoning process produces further negation(s) beyond the listed four lines/steps. Moreover, the feature of exhaustiveness of *catuṣkoṭi* makes it possible to think of the four

<sup>48</sup> Based on the observation that Twofold Mystery authors "sought to eradicate the ontological rift between being and nonbeing, or being and emptiness", Sharf holds that they are largely influenced by Buddhism and hence differ from WANG Bi 王弼, who "tended to exalt nonbeing over being," as well as from Xiang-Guo, who "exalted being over nonbeing". See Sharf 2002: 66.

<sup>49</sup> In addition to pointing out these two features, Jayatilleke and Robinson also hold that *catuṣkoṭi* is a disjunctive system. To say that *catuṣkoṭi* is a disjunctive system is to say that when one of the alternatives is taken to be true, the rest of them are false. (Jayatilleke 1967:70–71; Wayman 1977: 6) The disjunctive relation between the four alternatives is found in *Anguttara Nikaya* II 25 and argued for by Jayatilleke (2008 [1963]: 345–346). In Robinson's words, the four alternatives are "in a relation of exclusive disjunction ("one of, but not more than one of, 'a,' 'b,' 'c,' 'd,' is true"). See Robinson 1957: 301. Since some *catuṣkoṭi* in *MMK* as well as in early Buddhist canons are all rejected or denied, some scholars, however, hold that *catuṣkoṭi* is a conjunctive system (e.g. Nakamura 1958: 384).

alternatives as *synchronous* while the four positions in the Daoist cases, including Cheng's exegesis, must work *progressively*.<sup>50</sup>

Third, *MMK* (III)—the conjunction of *A* and  $\bar{A}$ —does not appear in the Daoist texts, not even in Cheng's exegesis.<sup>51</sup> That Cheng does not take up the position of conjunction as developed *MMK* (III) may be explained by his division of reality into two realms: on the one hand, the myriad things, as the traces 迹 or functions 用 of the Dao, are either being or nonbeing; on the other hand, the Dao, the origin 本/essence 體, can be said to be neither-being-nor-nonbeing. In this framework, nothing—neither the Dao nor any of the things—can be understood as both being and nonbeing.

Fourth, as noticed, Cheng's four steps start with the negation rather than with the affirmation of being. This makes his four steps purely negative and different from the other Daoist cases. This may be related to a widely discussed phenomenon in the usage of *catuṣkoṭi*. Scholars have noticed that, in many cases of *catuṣkoṭi* in *MMK*, all four alternatives are rejected, denied, or negated, as can be seen in, for example, the cases of *catuṣkoṭi* in *MMK* 1.1 and 25.22.<sup>52</sup> In these cases, none of the *koṭis* is accepted as truth. Together with the condition that the four alternatives in early Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Nikāya* or the *Āgamas*, are mainly denied or rejected, this phenomenon lends itself to interpreting *MMK* 18.8 negatively, to wit, to understanding this verse as if the Buddha takes none of the *koṭis* as supreme truth.

Finally, as methodology serves a goal, we may at this point raise further inquiries: what is Cheng's purpose in employing such Buddhist-influenced methodology? What does the Chongxuan style serve to discover? And, more broadly, are these four philosophers, given their similar methodologies, searching for the same goal/truth?

The reasoning processes found in the *Zhuangzi* category paragraph and its Xiang-Guo interpretation challenge the reader's fixed opinions or beliefs and can hence be regarded as aiming at self-cultivation via critical thinking. While the *Zhuangzi* paragraph ends in uncertainty, the Xiang-Guo commentary frames the

<sup>50</sup> Notably, some scholars also take *catuṣkoṭi* as dialectic and hence progressive. For example, Robinson and Kajiyama consider the set of four alternatives as a dialectic process in which the fourth is the highest and the final statement presented by the Buddha. See Kajiyama and Ueyama 1973–1974: 119–120 and Robinson 1967: 56. Yet, this so-called “progress” does not necessarily target the same audience, and in this respect it is different from “progress” in the Daoist tradition.

<sup>51</sup> See Huang 2001: 36–44.

<sup>52</sup> Take *MMK* 1.1 as an example. It contains the four alternatives regarding causation: “*na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyām nāpy ahetutaḥ, utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana kecana*. (Entities of any kind are not ever found anywhere produced from themselves, from another, from both [themselves and another], and also from no cause.)” In this case, all the four alternatives are rejected. The Sanskrit text is based on Kalupahana 1991: 105; the English translation refers to Ruegg 2005 [1977]: 215. For individual discussions on the *catuṣkoṭi* in *MMK* 1.1 and 25.22, see Wayman (1977): 10–14. Cases whose alternatives are all denied are sometimes referred to as “negative *catuṣkoṭi* (tetralemma).” Their configuration is as follows: (I) ...not *A*...; (II) ...not  $\bar{A}$ ...; (III) ...not [*A* and  $\bar{A}$ ]...; (IV) ...not [ $\bar{A}$  and not- $\bar{A}$ ]..., as found in *MMK* 22.12. See Yang 1988: 133–139; Garfield and Priest 2003: 13–14.

final step more positively as an ideal mental state that disregards and transcends the framework of right/wrong value judgments.

By contrast, *MMK* 18.8 and Cheng's annotation explicitly treat the four alternatives as teaching devices.<sup>53</sup> The scholars who understand the entire *catuṣkoṭi* negatively suggest that Nāgārjuna reads the Buddha's teaching as excluding "all positions resulting from dichotomizing conceptualization that polarizes itself as *A/Ā*" (Ruegg 2005 [1977]:228). Some other scholars, following Candrakīrti's (600–650 CE) commentary to *MMK*, take *MMK* 18.8 positively. They see the four alternatives as Buddha's instructional devices aimed at different levels of audience: the first *koṭi* targets rather ordinary unintelligent people; the second targets disciples of a higher quality; the third instructs the practitioners who have reached a certain degree of cultivation without having achieved *nirvāṇa*; and the fourth *koṭi* represents the highest and the ultimate instruction for the wisest audience or disciples.<sup>54</sup> As instructional devices, the four alternatives are *all* valid in their own rights. Furthermore, even if the first three *koṭi* are regarded as incomplete in expressing the truth, at least the last *koṭi* is considered highly close to the truth or the most appropriate statement of the truth. Despite the diverse opinions on the negative or positive reading of *MMK* 18.8, scholars commonly agree that the goal or destination of *catuṣkoṭi* is the Supreme Truth (*paramārtha-satya*), the truth that transcends the conventional truths construed by language or by logical thinking.<sup>55</sup> According to Inada (1993), the *catuṣkoṭi* in *MMK* is employed "in order to exhibit the fact that the final truth transcends all these possibilities; it is *śūnyatā* per se." (Inada 1993: 113)

As for Cheng, he utilizes the Chongxuan style also to reach some Ultimate; yet for him, "The Ultimate" refers to the Dao, which Chongxuan thinkers divide into two interchangeable conceptual pairs: the essence and its functions, and the origin and its traces.<sup>56</sup> To take his annotation of the category paragraph as an example, Cheng holds that this *Zhuangzi* paragraph teaches the unenlightened step-by-step: from the traces, manifest in being and nonbeing, to the origin, which transcends being and nonbeing. In addition, Cheng demonstrates the connection between the essence, neither-being-nor-nonbeing, and the functions, being and nonbeing: when the Dao is working or is put into practice, it manifests as being or nonbeing; seeing through being and nonbeing, the enlightened one will be able to grasp their origin, to wit, the Dao.

<sup>53</sup> In Cheng's annotation, the audience is referred to as "the masses 群生" or "the ordinary 世".

<sup>54</sup> This description of Candrakīrti's opinion is based on Ruegg (2005 [1977]): 217. Please refer to Ruegg's article for a more comprehensive explanation.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Gunaratne 1986: 227.

<sup>56</sup> Cheng (2006) points out that the ultimate aspect in CHENG Xuanying's thought is different from that exhibited in Madhyamaka. See Cheng 2006: 164.

## 4 Conclusion

Based on the above observations, we may summarize Cheng's incorporation of Daoist and Buddhist dual-negation methodologies as follows. Cheng maintains the progress from the Daoist tradition but rephrases this progress with a Buddhist flavor: he deliberately takes up the "neither...nor" construction and restrains the negated oppositions between "being" and "nonbeing." By changing the terminology, Cheng not only makes the Chongxuan style compatible with the thought of contemporary Madhyamika Buddhists such as Jizang 吉藏 (CE 549–623) but also strengthens its character of negation beyond what we found in the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and the Xiang-Guo commentary.<sup>57</sup> For Cheng, the Chongxuan style serves Daoist practitioners to reach the ultimate state, where one is completely free from any burden or attachment; it also serves as a teaching strategy employed by a sage to the unenlightened.<sup>58</sup> While the former purpose is certainly in line with the Daoist tradition, the latter is similar to *MMK* 18.8, where Nāgārjuna clearly treats *catuṣkoṭi* as an instruction utilized by the Buddha. Yet, concerning what goal the methodology serves, Cheng clearly chooses an existing entity, *Dao*, over emptiness, favored especially by Mādhyamaka. Based on the above observations, we may say that Cheng ingeniously incorporates the dual-negation methodologies from both traditions while maintaining his own position as a Daoist.

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<sup>57</sup> Jizang, a proponent of the Buddhist Three Treatise School, praises Buddhism and criticizes Daoism by commenting that Daoism, unlike Buddhism, does not transcend the framework constructed by the four alternatives (超四句). See Jizang, *Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises* 三論玄義, T45: 2a; 2c. In Cheng's exegesis, CHENG Xuanying deliberately argues that Daoist reasoning does transcend the framework of the four alternatives.

<sup>58</sup> For a further discussion of the ultimate state, please refer to Zhou 2003: 303–315.

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## Chapter 20

# Wang Fuzhi's Evaluation of the *Zhuangzi*



Mingran Tan

## 1 Introduction

WANG Fuzhi regarded all schools of thought aside from Confucianism—including Daoism—as heresies. He believed that they went against the general principle of Heaven and earth, betrayed the constitution of the early sage kings, disintegrated the subtle meaning of the Six Classics, and had misunderstood the contents of the mind and of nature, thus destroying the constant principles of right and wrong (Wang 1996:[10] 279). In his view, they merely provided convenient or expedient ideas that petty people took advantage of. For instance, HU Guang 胡廣 (1370–1418) distorted “the Mean (*zhongyong* 中庸)” based on Zhuangzi’s notion of “leaving a thing as it is (*yuyong* 寓庸);” and FENG Dao 馮道 (882–954) proposed his vulgar concept of constant happiness (*changle* 常樂), based on Zhuangzi’s understanding of “perfect happiness (*zhile* 至樂)” (Wang 1996: [1] 1113). However, he did not deny heretical doctrines without reservation. He believed that there were buried treasures within them, and he wanted to enter their fortresses to snatch their treasures, so to speak. At the same time, he wanted to disclose their weaknesses, and use them to restore the true Way of Confucianism (Wang 1996: [13] 15). Therefore, if in his Confucian works, Wang tried to establish Confucianism through criticism of heretical doctrines, his Daoist works aimed to enrich Confucianism through finding or absorbing valuable ideas from Laozi and Zhuangzi.

Both the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* were profound and systematic in their discussion of Dao, Heaven, natural process, and non-interference, and WANG Fuzhi could not help but follow their cosmic view of Dao and the myriad things and more or less transcend his Confucian anthropocentric worldview. Although he once claimed that Zhuangzi did not know Dao (the Confucian Way or the Way of man) because he shunned human responsibility (Wang 1996: [12] 484), he had to admit that Zhuangzi

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awakened to Dao (the Daoist Way or the Way of Heaven) from the undifferentiated state of Heaven (*huntian* 渾天) (Wang 1996: [13] 395). To some degree, although he tried to interpret the *Zhuangzi* with Confucianism, such as in sophistically arguing that the sage king Yao 堯 had no self and was a perfect man (*zhiren* 至人) (Wang 1996: [13] 88), he had to accept Zhuangzi's criticism of Confucian scholars as "being morally superior to others and instructing them (*lin ren yi de* 臨人以德)" and "rectifying oneself in order to rectify others," (Zhu 1983:143) as Confucius and Mencius had advocated.<sup>1</sup> He even expressed disfavor toward BI Gan's 比干 and GUAN Longfeng's 關龍鋒 ultimate remonstrance toward their kings through their deaths and appreciated Zhuangzi's method of accommodating and transforming others with an open and void mind (Wang 1996: [13] 407). He especially acknowledged Zhuangzi's criticism of those Confucian scholars who wore Confucian dress and hats but did not grasp the Confucian spirit, insisting that a true scholar should be one with Dao or the great yin-yang transformation, responding to events spontaneously and not leaving any trace or being attached to fixed rules (Wang 1996: [13] 326).

More specifically, he accepted ideas such as Zhuangzi's concept of consolidating spirit (*ningshen* 凝神), letting things be themselves (*yuyong* 寓庸), and making all controversies equal. By using Zhuangzi's method of survival in difficult times, he passed through the period of the WU Sanguai 吳三桂 (1612–1678) Rebellion, although he clarified that he was not one of Zhuangzi's disciples. By incorporating Zhuangzi's criticism of meritocracy, moral superiority and petty favors, he tried to enrich or correct Confucianism and concluded that "All Zhuangzi's thoughts can be transformed into the Way of the *junzi* 君子 or noble person (the Confucian Way)" (F. Wang 1996: [13] 493). As a result, he showed inconsistency between his criticism and his acknowledgement of the virtue of Zhuangzi's thought. In order to straighten out this confusing position, it is necessary to analyze his concepts and remarks according to their specific context, for he generally criticized Zhuangzi in his commentaries on Confucian classics and historical works, while acknowledging him in his annotations and comments on the *Zhuangzi*.

## 2 WANG Fuzhi's Understanding of Dao in the *Zhuangzi*

WANG Fuzhi mainly appreciated Zhuangzi's view of Dao from the perspective of Heaven and nature (*ziran* 自然) while criticizing him for his neglect of social responsibility from the perspective of the human. He admitted that Zhuangzi awakened to the Way of Heaven from the undifferentiated state of Heaven and reached the same height as ZHOU Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) who had proposed the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極), and Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) who described Heaven as "pure, void, singular and great (*qing yu yi da* 清虛一大)." But he indicated that

<sup>1</sup> Mencius saw himself like YI Yin to be the firstly informed and awakened, and had a responsibility to instruct those who were later in being informed and awakened. (Zhu 1983: 310)

Zhuangzi could not establish the Way of the human or the commandments for the people (*wei shenmin liming* 為生民立命) based on his understanding of the Way of Heaven (F. Wang 1996: [13] 395). Therefore, what Wang appreciated was Zhuangzi's knowledge of the Way of Heaven, i.e., "The interaction of yin and yang is Dao (*yi yin yi yang zhi wei dao* 一陰一陽之謂道)." However, he did not think that Zhuangzi realized that humanity and righteousness were also the Way of Heaven endowed on human beings, and criticized him for shunning human responsibilities. Therefore, in his Confucian works, WANG Fuzhi mainly aimed to promote Confucianism through criticizing Zhuangzi, while in his Daoist commentaries, he tried to reinterpret Zhuangzi's ideas in terms of Confucianism and absorb them into his syncretism, i.e., transform the *Zhuangzi* with the aim of pursuing humanity (F. Wang 1996: [13] 493). For example, Chapter 17 *Qiu Shui* 秋水 of the *Zhuangzi* proposed that one would be able to understand the principle of things and deal with circumstances when interacting with them if one grasped the Dao. WANG Fuzhi highly appreciated this idea and thought that this would help one to act in accordance with the nature and situation of other people and things. It distinguished one's action from the reckless actions and groping in the dark of the ignorant. He used the notion of "lot or duty (*fen* 分)" to explain how to apply the Way of Heaven to human affairs. He pointed out that a person must fulfill his human duty once born as a human being; a horse must be bridled on its head and an ox must be pierced through its nose for the utility of human beings, for these were their lots from Heaven and the manifestation of Dao (F. Wang 1996: [13] 277–278). Obviously, WANG Fuzhi tried to meld Confucian notions of duty and societal roles into Zhuangzi's Dao, although Zhuangzi's Dao also shared the meaning of fate or destiny. In his comment on Chapter 19 *Da Sheng* (達生) of the *Zhuangzi*, he highly praised Zhuangzi for the preservation of spirit through forgetting worldly concerns and the human body, and for the assistance to Heaven (*xiangtian* 相天) through personal cultivation. He indicated that this chapter elucidated the reality and principle of human life and elevated Zhuangzi's ideas to the height that Confucian sages proposed, in establishing virtues, teachings, achievements and doctrines. He even claimed that this idea was more reasonable in elucidating the principle of production and transformation of Heaven than Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) doctrine,<sup>2</sup> and matched with the explanation of life and death in the *Book of Changes* and the *Analects*. He concluded that Zhuangzi was an ardent (*kuang* 狂者) who had not forgotten his Confucian heritage (Wang 1996: [13] 293–294). Hence again, WANG Fuzhi connected Zhuangzi's idea with Confucius', and especially interpreted the assistance to Heaven in terms of "the assistance of Heaven and earth's transformation and nourishment (*zan tiandi zhi huayu* 贊天地之化育)" in *The Doctrine of the Mean* (Zhu 1983: 32). To understand Wang's attitude toward Zhuangzi's Dao, we will first discuss his comments on Zhuangzi's Dao from the perspective of ontology, and then elucidate his criticism of Zhuangzi from the perspective of human duty in the next section.

<sup>2</sup>In WANG Fuzhi's view, ZHU Xi assumed that a person's *qi* would perish and become nothing after his death (Wang 1996: [12] 22).

In *Zhangzi Zhengmeng Zhu* (張子正蒙注), based on his *qi*-monism, WANG Fuzhi had assumed that Laozi and Zhuangzi did not know Dao because they regarded it to be the nothingness of what they could not see or hear (Wang 1996: [12] 272). He also indicated that both Zhuangzi and another Daoist figure, Liezi, blindly imitated heavenly process, followed trends and situations, passively remained at rest and were not able to be resolute and thus did not know how to emulate Kun 坤<sup>3</sup> (Wang 1996: [1] 697). In his view, the right way to emulate the Kun was to be magnanimous and humane, and be ready to take responsibility. When it comes to the elucidation of Dao, he criticized Zhuangzi for seeing it as too lofty and separating it from common sense. “Zhuangzi rejected debate and asked others to understand him intuitively. If others cannot smile and match him intuitively, he would leave them without instruction. It is right here where his obstinacy and inflexibility lies” (Wang 1996: [6] 809).

However, in *Zhuangzi Jie* (莊子解), he admitted that Zhuangzi awakened to Dao as the undifferentiated state of Heaven (*hundun* 渾沌), which was also “the one unbroken flux of *qi* in the universe (*tong tianxia zhi yi qi* 通天下之一氣)” (Guo 1961: 733). In his view, Zhuangzi’s Dao was the unity of great and small, long and short, Heaven and man, self and others, and was beyond analysis and expression in words (Wang 1996: [13] 110). He also described Zhuangzi’s Dao as “the center of a circle (*huan zhong* 環中)” and the circle as the endless antithesis and distinction of great and small, self and other, and so on. If a person stood at the center, however, he would transcend all antitheses and see everything as one: “One will see no other people because all people are a part of Heaven; one will see no things because all things are a part of Heaven.” Then one would give up all attachment and prejudice and find that everyone could be a sage (Wang 1996: [13] 394–395). Hence, WANG Fuzhi identified Zhuangzi’s Dao with Heaven, and insisted that it transcended time and space as well as human distinctions (Wang 1996: [13] 219). In an effort to unite with Dao, a person must abandon human distinction, dim his perceptions and become detached. Without attachment and prejudice, he would be able to take Heaven and all other people as his masters and act in accordance with their nature and principle, or put himself in their shoes. Then without showing any intention to change them, they would be transformed spontaneously. Humanity and righteousness were thus achieved without trace, and administration and teaching were done without effort (Wang 1996: [13] 395). Apparently, although Wang claimed he was transforming the *Zhuangzi* with the Way of the noble person, it seems that, here, he was tacitly using it to change Confucian teachings.

Because Dao was the undifferentiated state of Heaven or the unbroken flux of *qi*, and subsumed everything, WANG Fuzhi also followed Zhuangzi in rejecting two of its descriptions—“nothing does it (*mo wei* 莫為)” and “something makes it (*huo shi* 或使).” He pointed out that the failure of these two descriptions was due to their attachment. Being attached to one point of view, they would take something

<sup>3</sup>In *the Book of Changes*, Kun 坤 is regarded as the virtue of yin, earth and women, which should be humble, quiet and accommodating (Li 1994: 71–75).

concrete to be Dao. But if they transcended their attachment, they would be in a fine position to describe Dao (F. Wang 1996: [13] 405). In his comments on Chapter 22 (*Zhi Bei You* 知北遊) of the *Zhuangzi*, he claimed that nothing could be called Dao because nothing was beyond Dao. If the way to experience Dao was through no pondering or cogitation, no belief or practice, and no path or procedure, how could one deny that the reverse was also the way to do that? Therefore, the best way to experience Dao was to abandon both and instead follow time, change, and the nature of things, i.e., to see everything from the perspective of Heaven without uttering any word (Wang 1996: [13] 334).

However, like Zhuangzi, WANG Fuzhi did not advocate abandoning words completely although Dao was beyond expression in words. Instead, he insisted that every word was the carrier and manifestation of Dao if the speaker did not attach to it. The reason was that Dao was the great transformation of *qi* and the wholeness of the universe and kept changing. Everything was a part of Dao and manifested it, but would become its trace when we tried to point to it and say "Dao is here." For this reason, Zhuangzi tried to destroy people's attachment through many negations of "the beginning (*shi* 始)" in *Qi Wu Lun*. Wang grasped this idea and said that this aimed to destroy people's distinction between "this" and "that." Although it seemed that no word was close to Dao, if a person did not utter his words with prejudice or a predetermined mind (*chengxin* 成心), he could still elucidate Dao through words (Wang 1996: [13] 109). In other words, if a person did not become attached to anything, his words would be similar to the blowing of wind and the chirrup of birds and express Dao spontaneously, i.e., "no word was not word, and no Dao was not Dao" (Wang 1996: [13] 102).

With regard to Dao as the undifferentiated state of Heaven, WANG Fuzhi also deemed it to be the natural process (*ziran* 自然) of heavenly transformation. In his comment on Chapter 22 of the *Zhuangzi*, *Zhi Bei You*, he first indicated that Dao was nonbeing (*wu* 無). However, this nonbeing was not nothingness, but the undifferentiated and indescribable state of the universe. In his own words, "Nonbeing is the undifferentiated Great Void (*taixu* 太虛) where heavenly transformation runs spontaneously. It is indescribable and thus labeled as nonbeing... It contains the ten thousand things in one room, and identifies life with death. It runs by itself in the Great Void, without beginning, end or time." (Wang 1996: [13] 225).

He then insisted that from this nonbeing, spirit and all things were generated. He called this generating process natural (*ziran* 自然) and identified it as Dao: "What is natural is called Dao, and there is not something concrete called Dao indeed". He went on to state:

What is natural means that it becomes so from some place. This place is a place before the arising of spirit and is temporarily labeled as "Dao". However, this Dao never separates from things it has produced. (Wang 1996: [13] 338)

Therefore, in Wang's view, Dao was the original and ongoing state of the universe. It included not only the whole body of the universe, but also the existent state of the ten thousand things and the universal yin-yang transformation. This existent state was the natural state of the ten thousand things, the self-so-ing (*ziran* 自然). Due to

this unique character of Dao, if a person misunderstood Dao as something concrete, leaving his natural life-style and seeking it outside, he would miss the Dao even though he faced it at every moment. This explains why both Zhuangzi and WANG Fuzhi advocated being detached and following the natural course in the experience of Dao.

However, Wang did not forget to justify Confucianism from the perspective of self-so-ing. He first insightfully elucidated *ziran* in terms of the difference between man-made blossoms and the blossoms naturally blooming on peach and plum trees, and indicated that *ziran* was the state that a thing depended on in itself to display its potential, instead of depending on anything else. He then went on to assert that the righteousness and principle in the human mind also naturally existed and were self-so-ing. If a person reflected and nurtured them, they would grow spontaneously (Wang 1996: [6] 1019). As a result, WANG Fuzhi assumed that he had distinguished his *ziran* from Zhuangzi's. He accused Zhuangzi of abandoning the principle of things to preserve his empty mind (*pie xia wuli qiu zi* 撇下物理求自), while he himself, like Mencius, nurtured righteousness and principle in his mind and accommodated the myriad things (Wang 1996: [6] 1018).

But the following question arises: if everything is in transformation, and great and small, favor and disfavor, the noble and the lowly keep switching, and it is through being detached and following the natural course that one can grasp Dao, then what is the meaning or necessity of grasping it? Similar to the view of Chapter 17 *Qiu Shui* in the *Zhuangzi*, WANG Fuzhi thought that one's knowledge of Dao would help him to abide by the principle of things and know how to deal with circumstances (*yin li da quan* 因理達權). He indicated that if a person knew the Dao, he would observe things carefully, keep Dao calmly and show Dao cautiously. He would depend upon the circumstances to apply Dao in a timely fashion and nurture his heavenly virtue without deliberation. Thus, he would get everything done perfectly and thereby distinguish himself from those who groped in the dark and hurt themselves by approaching fire and water, summer and winter, wolf and tiger unwisely (Wang 1996: [13] 277). Wang's difference from Zhuangzi is that he took the knowledge of Dao as the premise to distinguish the noble ZENG Cen (曾參) from the tyrant Jie and the Bandit Zhi (桀跖), while Zhuangzi emphasized self-protection and the fulfillment of one's natural life-span and was never concerned with the distinction between the noble and the evil. In this way, WANG Fuzhi attached Confucian value to his comments on the *Zhuangzi*.

It becomes more obvious that WANG Fuzhi interpreted the *Zhuangzi* utilizing Confucian values in his comment on *Da Sheng* (達生), Chapter 19 of the *Zhuangzi*. Here, Wang indicated that if one understood Dao, one would understand that life and death, darkness and brightness were one, and would not be attached to the human body but follow the transformation of yin and yang. Then one would be able to maintain peace and cultivate one's harmonious *qi* even in the face of disasters and death, and assist Heaven with his harmonious *qi* (Wang 1996: [13] 291–292), consistently with the assistance of the transformation and nourishment of Heaven and earth as mentioned in *The Doctrine of the Mean*.



### 3 WANG Fuzhi's Criticism of Zhuangzi's Heaven and the Human

In WANG Fuzhi's Confucian works, he mainly followed Xunzi to emphasize the distinction between Heaven and the human, and disagreed with Zhuangzi who believed in completely following natural process. He argued:

The Way of Heaven belongs to Heaven; the Way of humans belongs to humans...The teaching of the sage and worthy distinguishes the human from things below, and warns that humans should not see themselves as equal to Heaven above. Heaven is natural; things are natural. When bees and ants comply with righteousness, and rats perform ceremonies, they do not need learning for they just follow their natural instincts. If one puts too much emphasis on following the natural course (*ziran*), and tries to unite with Heaven, he may turn Heaven into a concrete object. Be careful. (Wang 1996: [6] 1144)

Here, WANG Fuzhi assumed that Zhuangzi and his disciples would abandon human choice and passively follow the natural course, just as bees and ants acted by their instincts. Although Zhuangzi had realized this problem and warned that "There is no grief greater than the death of the mind" (Guo 1961:707) and proposed "to abide by the principles of things and deal with circumstances" (Guo 1961: 588), it is true that he could not solve the contradiction between following the natural course of things and using human intelligence. As a result, his disciples attacked humanity and righteousness (*renyi*) and regarded them as contradictory to nature, and advocated following one's natural or instinctive ability and not emulating others. They regarded ZENG Cen's filial piety and SHI Kuang's sharp hearing as innate; and it was futile for others to imitate them (Guo 1961: 327). From this point of view, WANG Fuzhi was right to point out that Daoists put too much emphasis on nature (*ziran*) but ignored human intelligence. In WANG Fuzhi's eyes, although human beings were born from Heaven, they were differentiated from it and other creatures by their intelligence, and thus should not completely follow the Way of Heaven. Moreover, human intelligence was also a natural product, so to eliminate it was also to go against nature. Hence, WANG Fuzhi found a serious inconsistency in Daoism, for both Laozi and Zhuangzi failed to solve the contradiction between using human intelligence and completely following natural process. For example, Zhuangzi promoted the elimination of truth and falsity in order to wipe out human opinions and achieve the great Dao. If so, human intelligence might become unnecessary, being an obstacle to the experience of Dao. Then it was logical that he should accept SHEN Dao's (慎到) idea that man behaved like a dead thing, moving only after being pushed. But Zhuangzi realized that accepting this would lead to the meaninglessness of human life, so he rejected it and claimed the Dao of SHEN Dao to be the principle of a dead person (Guo 1961:1088). However, Zhuangzi never told readers how to reconcile these two contradictory ideas.

Finding the inconsistency of Daoism, WANG Fuzhi advocated human efforts in governance and moral cultivation. Through citing a passage in *The Book of Changes*, "Heaven produced the myriad things and did not share the sage's worry," he indicated that the sage did not emulate Heaven blindly but had his own concerns. The

sage's concern was how to sustain the people in the world with humanity and righteousness. In contrast, he condemned Laozi for abandoning humanity and righteousness and emulating Heaven blindly, when for instance, Laozi asked the sage to look at the people as straw dogs. He observed that the human and Heaven were both natural products and each had its own way. Humans should not passively follow the Way of Heaven, but should use their intelligence and efforts to achieve what Heaven did not provide. He said, "Only after humans cannot get what they need from Heaven do they use intelligence. Only when they do not encounter good times is the Confucian Way valued," (Wang 1996: [2] 238). Therefore, the Confucian sages did not passively listen to fate or the situation, but made an effort to change them.

WANG Fuzhi went on to give preference to human governance over Daoist non-interference, namely, the idea that "Things can govern themselves; leaving them alone, they will be in order." He rejoined, " 'Things govern themselves' is not good governance at all. This way avoids troubles temporarily, but buries the seed for future disasters and troubles" (Wang 1996: [2] 238). It is true that human society needs governance, but Wang ignored the Daoist correction to the instrumental use of governance and corruption. It was through non-interference that Laozi and Zhuangzi tried to calm down the people's competition for profit and fame and return them to a simple and honest social ethos.

To defend governance, WANG Fuzhi acknowledged the fact that negative consequences might arise along with the promotion of positive virtues and governance. However, he did not think that human beings should stop promoting good virtues for that reason. He made an analogy: One would not stop crossing a river just because one could not find a time when there was no wave (Wang 1996: [1] 974). That is, although human governance might become instrumental, it was still better than a policy of non-interference. It was from this perspective that he proposed to distinguish the Way of the human from the Way of Heaven, and assist Heaven with human effort. He argued:

The Way of the human belongs to the Way of Heaven; but humans cannot take the Way of Heaven as their way. When discussing the great achievement of assisting Heaven, people recommend the sages. For those unable to assist Heaven, they just leave everything alone, let fish swim and birds fly by their instincts. However, although a human being dares not claim himself as a sage, how can he degrade himself to the level of birds and fish? (Wang 1996: [5] 617)

Here, Wang pointed out that the Way of the human is different from the Way of Heaven although it originated from the latter. Their difference is that the Way of man assists Heaven, i.e. to make up what Heaven does not provide. This assistance is more than to behave according to a person's biological instincts. It is to construct human institutions and morality with intelligence. Hence, Wang did not agree with Zhuangzi's doctrine that "Wind blows the ten thousand things differently and lets their sounds die out by themselves" (Guo 1961: 50), and insisted on the use of human intelligence to choose what man should do and thus assist Heaven.

He went on to elucidate his views on the Heaven-human distinction through commenting on a sentence in *The Book of Odes*, "Without knowledge or discrimination, one follows the Lord's principle (wu shi wu zhi shun di zhi ze 無識無知, 順帝

之則)。” He interpreted this as meaning one should not have any expectations, but abide by principle perfectly when doing something. He did not think it to mean that one should abandon knowledge and discrimination. On the contrary, in order to comply with the Lord's principle, one must use knowledge and discrimination. Based on this interpretation, he criticized Zhuangzi's idea of listening to fate. He argued:

Let one's liver change into worms and their arms become rats, let willows grow on their elbows, and crows build a nest on one's head. If one behaves as an infant and feed pigs as they feed human beings, can this be said to follow the Lord's principle? When not skillful in interpreting the *Odes*, one will sufficiently mislead the people in the world and harm the Way of the human. Thus, it is evident that the following of the Lord's principle cannot be done without knowledge and discrimination.” (Wang 1996: [3] 448–449)

All these behaviors were proposed in the *Zhuangzi* as a way to behave naturally. But WANG Fuzhi criticized them for going against the Lord's rule and harming the Way of the human. Wang was right because humans and other things each had their natural ways and humans should not take other things' natural way as their own. Zhuangzi's mistake was that he abandoned man's natural way to follow the natural way of other things. In order to make this distinction clear, Wang proposed distinguishing the natural Way of Heaven (*tian zhi tian* 天之天), the natural Way of humans (*ren zhi tian* 人之天), and the natural Way of things (*wu zhi tian* 物之天) (Wang 1996: [2] 271).

In order to serve Heaven well, Wang also warned students not to follow the Way of Heaven or adopt Laozi or Zhuangzi's Way of residing in vacuity and waiting for the movement of Heaven, but asked them to comply with the Confucian Way. He said:

What causes a person to give rise to his emotion and intentions suddenly? It is Heaven (instinct). However, a noble person will not rely upon Heaven (instinct) for his cultivation because his duty does not lie there... Instead, he can make a contribution to Heaven by regulating his own action. He does not let Heaven (instinct) control his actions. Before action, he makes a preparation; after action, he keeps an eye on the aftermath. Keeping his mind on the Confucian Way, he does not reside in vacuity to wait for the movement of Heaven (instinct). (Wang 1996: [3] 309)

This requires humans to act purposefully in order to serve Heaven well, and the approach is to follow the Confucian Way, i.e. with humanity and ritual propriety. In this way, Wang justified the legitimacy of Confucianism through criticizing the Daoist view of the human and Heaven.

Based on his emphasis on human effort, WANG Fuzhi criticized Zhuangzi's concept of natural completeness (*tianquan* 天全). He assumed that Zhuangzi's natural completeness was to follow the natural course or the Way of Heaven passively and that Zhuangzi favored the handicapped more than normal people and regarded them as naturally complete. He said:

Foolish is Zhuangzi's doctrine of natural completeness! If one must become complete in his heavenly nature like AI Tai Tuo (哀駘它) and SHU Shan Wuzhi (叔山無趾), then why hasn't Heaven made his eyes vertically arranged, or his tongue bifurcated, or simply turned him into stone or dead wood? If one can become chaste only after being deprived of the

ability to partake of adultery, or impartial only after being deprived of the ability of flattery, then the handsome men and pretty women will be inferior to barbarians, barbarians to birds, birds to wood and stone. Then all life between Heaven and earth would be destroyed. (Wang 1996: [3] 332)

Obviously, Wang misunderstood Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi never thought that people must be as crippled as Ai Tai Tuo or SHU Shan Wuzhi before achieving natural completeness. Zhuangzi used them as examples to show that one could perfect one's heavenly nature even with a handicapped body, let alone as a normal person. Zhuangzi never denied the life of human beings or proposed that dead things matched the Dao. In this point, WANG Fuzhi was attacking a Zhuangzi he had misinterpreted.

Finally, WANG Fuzhi attacked Zhuangzi's conception of naturalness (*ziran* 自然). He understood it as what is natural or the heavenly process, but regarded it as only one aspect of Dao. In other words, Wang thought Dao was broader than naturalness or heavenly process. He acknowledged that Zhuangzi had found the natural lots of fortune and misfortune, success and failure. But he thought that Zhuangzi would be wrong to assume that all principles were natural and learning, thinking and practice were artificial supplements. "It is only after uniting Heaven and Earth with human efforts that the capacities of the Way or *Dao* will be made comprehensive," (Wang 1996: [7]132). In Wang's view, Zhuangzi's nature was just natural process, it covered only one aspect of Dao and did not touch on human governance and management. But human choice also originated from Heaven and human civilization also matched Dao. In this way, Wang followed Xunzi to criticize Zhuangzi as "being blinded by naturalness but ignorant of human effort," (X. Wang 1988: 464).

#### 4 Criticism on Zhuangzi's Concept of Nature/*Xing*

WANG Fuzhi also showed inconsistency in his discussion of nature (*xing* 性). On the one hand, he acknowledged that Gaozi's view, "What is inborn is called nature," explained the reality that Heaven produced human beings and human beings then survived by themselves. Yet he criticized it for its emphasis on the function of life (*shengji* 生機) instead of the principle of life, which is to confuse the nature of human beings with that of birds (Wang 1996: [8] 682). Despite this criticism, he demonstrated his acceptance of Gaozi's view in his annotation on the *Zhuangzi*. There, he claimed that what was born was called nature. Nature was based on physical endowment, and different people were differently endowed (Wang 1996: [13]186). The question arises, whether there is a universal human nature? To answer this question, Wang proposed "the universal state of nature (*xing zhi chang ran* 性之常然)":

The universal state of nature will transcend feelings and names. It is balmy like spring but cannot be called humanity; it is chilly like autumn but cannot be called righteousness. It does not distinguish the beautiful from the ugly among the five colors, and neither distinguishes the refined from the vulgar among the five sounds. Not beautiful, so not ugly; not

refined, so not vulgar. If there is no name to be named, there will be no such names as ZENG Cen or SHI Qiu. The perfect correctness (*zhi zheng* 至正) will not have to be correct; without the correct, it is not incorrect either (Wang 1996: [13] 186).

Wang's remarks show that the universal state of nature is perfect correctness. It has no name and transcends all human distinctions, but can accomplish humanity and righteousness spontaneously. It transcends all standards but is the standard for all things. At this point, we can guess that it is Dao or self-so-ing (*ziran* 自然). His discussion on the reality of nature and endowment (*xing ming zhi qing* 性命之情) verifies our assumption. He said:

It becomes square when meeting a square thing, and becomes round when meeting a round one. It lets those united be united, and those disintegrated be disintegrated. It just follows its natural way, doing whatever suitable, including humanity, righteousness, inhumanity, and unrighteousness. This is the reality of nature and endowment (*ming* 命).<sup>4</sup> (Wang 1996: [13] 188).

Wang's description reminds us of Laozi's words, "The Great Dao flows everywhere. It may go left and right." (Lou 1980: 86) In short, the universal state of nature is the natural process or Dao. It lets things be themselves and does not add any human deliberation to their existential state.

Moreover, Wang also realized that there is a difference between nature (*xing* 性) and endowment (*ming* 命) and did not want to confuse them with Dao. Although he endorsed that what Heaven endowed was nature in *the Doctrine of the Mean*, he insisted nature was the concretization of endowment in *qi* and bodies. He thus claimed that the endowment belonged to Heaven and was broad and universal, while nature belonged to human beings and was narrow and concrete. Once a human being was endowed with human nature, he must act according to it, not according to the endowment (Wang 1996: [13] 512).

He went on to say, "The original state of the Way of Heaven is endowment, while the Way of Heaven endowed on human beings is nature. Nature is endowment, but endowment is more than nature," (Wang 1996: [6] 530). What the sage needed to do was just to recover his own nature, and then the myriad things would restore their nature too. The sage would not coerce those people to do what they could not, and neither would he worry about those people's ignorance (Wang 1996: [13] 393). In this way, following the self-soing way, he and the myriad things would each fulfill their nature and endowment. Apparently, WANG Fuzhi adopted Daoist non-interference to transform and nourish the myriad things, and in this regard departed from his proposition to educate the people and utilize the things in his Confucian works.

On the other hand, WANG Fuzhi followed Mencius to claim that human nature was the principle of life, not the function of life (*sheng zhi ji* 生之幾) (Wang 1996: [1] 890), such as movement or perception. He insisted that human beings were different from and superior to other creatures in their principle of life but the same in

<sup>4</sup>Wang Fuzhi interpreted endowment (*ming* 命) in *the Doctrine of the Mean* as what Heaven endows on each thing, and was different from Zhu Xi who understood it as decree.

their function of life. Because nature was the principle of human life, WANG Fuzhi thus believed it could transcend the existence of the human body although it must manifest itself through bodily activities. He argued:

Sensation and movement thrive when a person is alive, but stop when he is dead. Nature is the prevailing of heavenly principle, gathering in the human body when one's *qi* gathers, returning to the Great Void when one's *qi* disperses. Its arrival and departure are like the alternation of daytime and night, and yet it never perishes for Heaven never stops its transformation. (Wang 1996: [12] 126)

Based on this assumption, Wang suggested that a person should use human nature to guide his bodily activities, such as to regulate feelings and desires with human nature. If a person could do this, he would be able to express his feelings and fulfill his desires in due measure, cultivate his harmonious *qi* and live for ten thousand years, for his cultivated harmonious *qi* and its principle (human nature) would remain in the universe forever.

With his fondness of human nature, it is surprising to note that he again criticized Zhuangzi for valuing human nature over the body. In his view, Zhuangzi's preference for human nature over the body had caused common people not to be filial to or support their parents. Because when common people followed him to value their spirits or human nature, they would look down on their own bodies and as a result look down on their parents' bodies and lack the motive to support them. He supported his argument by quoting Zhuangzi's words, "There is a thing within me more valuable and lofty than the foot, so I do not know my foot has been cut" (Wang 1996: [13] 695–696). Unquestionably, for Zhuangzi, the spirit or human nature was more valuable and lofty. However, WANG Fuzhi went too far in his argument, for a person's being unfilial might arise from love of his own body and children too. For an ordinary person, it is not necessarily because he forgets his body but more often because he favors his body that he does not support or love his parents. Provided he truly valued spirit (human nature) more than body, he would look down on worldly goods (in the way of some true Daoists and some Buddhist monks), and not be so cruel and selfish.

Moreover, in the above quoted words, Zhuangzi was talking about his elevation to a tranquil state of mind and not being troubled by worldly loss and gain. It is similar or identical to Mencius and WANG Fuzhi's proposition—to preserve the Great Body (human nature) through transcending the Small Body (biological instincts)—and it cannot be deduced that Zhuangzi looked down on the human body.

With his misunderstanding of the relation of human nature and body in the *Zhuangzi*, Wang continued to accuse Zhuangzi of not knowing that there was heavenly principle in the human body, but seeking for Dao in an obscure place. He said:

The Daoist says, "There is being. There is a not yet beginning to be being. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be being. At the third level, he is out of breath, and does not know where to seek Dao. For the Way of the noble person, one cultivates the virtues of humanity, righteousness, rituals and wisdom based on one's nature; and investigates the rules of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure based on one's feeling. (Wang 1996: [6] 491)

Here, Wang deliberately misinterpreted Zhuangzi's words of seeking Dao, and proposed his Confucian method as a correction. He assumed that Zhuangzi left the human body to seek Dao nowhere, and thus proposed his Confucian Way which was identical with human nature and manifested as humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom. However, he did not realize that Zhuangzi condemned these Confucian principles as artificial measures and a barrier to the grasp of Dao. As is known, Zhuangzi tried to elucidate the indescribability of Dao and the limit of human words with these negations, and never proposed to seek Dao deliberately. Moreover, Zhuangzi never suggested seeking Dao apart from the human body. On the contrary, it was through following one's nature and feelings that one realized Dao.

WANG Fuzhi also tried to support his criticism of Zhuangzi's division of human nature from the body with Zhuangzi's words, "the perfect person has no self (*zhiren wu ji* 至人無己)." (Guo 1961: 17) He insisted that the human body was the basis of virtue and the carrier of nature and feeling and should not be abandoned, but he did not know that Zhuangzi aimed to transcend worldly concerns and elevate oneself to the level of generosity and universal openness rather than abandoning the human body. Let's look at WANG Fuzhi's argument:

Accommodating the world in me, I thus attain no-self... Knowing the existence of Heaven, earth and the myriad things and the fact that I accommodate all of them, I can understand the sage's no-self... Therefore, the sage's no-self is to rest in his lot and undertake his duty properly. Everyone has his lot to stay. To go beyond one's lot or stand out of Heaven, earth and the myriad things, one will be described as having self. The sage thinks this a shame and does not do this. Everyone has his inescapable duty to perform. To conceive of oneself arrogantly above Heaven, earth and the myriad things, one will be described as having self. The sage fears Heaven and does not do it (Wang 1996: [13] 649–650).

In this passage, WANG Fuzhi used Confucian ideas of lot and duty to interpret the notion of having no-self. If one is satisfied with one's lot and duty, one would be referred to as having no-self. Otherwise one would be referred to as having self. This is far away from Zhuangzi's idea of no-self. If one always had one's duty and lot in mind, one must be careful about one's compliance and practice of them. How could one be described as having no-self? At the most, it could be called being unselfish or satisfied with one's lot. In contrast, Zhuangzi's notion of no-self referred to unity with cosmic transformation, without distinction of gain and loss, life and death, a true tranquility of mind and no-self. Therefore, it is obvious that Wang tried to criticize Zhuangzi from the Confucian anthropocentric and moral perspective, but did not realize that he was using a stalk to strike a pillar.



## 5 Criticism on Zhuangzi's Method of Survival in Difficult Times

In the preface to his *Transformation of the Zhuangzi* (*Zhuangzi Tong* 莊子通), WANG Fuzhi acknowledged Zhuangzi's method of survival as an efficient strategy for difficult times, but insisted it was inadequate from the perspective of Confucianism, so he wrote the book to correct the *Zhuangzi* and attempted to make it match the Way of the noble person. In that case, what is Zhuangzi's method, and why is it insufficient in Wang's view?

As he saw it, from the perspective of dealing with other people and external things, Zhuangzi's method of survival was to leave things as they were and maintain detachment toward worldly affairs. In this way, one would not be involved in social affairs and thus avoid danger. Wang explained:

Concerning the unpredictable popular trends—accepting what people accept, denying what people deny, with no word but leaving them as they are—this is the art of making equal of things. When having no choice, one can temporarily use it as a method of survival in a chaotic time. (Wang 1996: [3] 471)

In practice, Wang followed Zhuangzi to acknowledge that evaluation was the origin of danger and crisis, and thus appreciated Zhuangzi's non-distinction of right and wrong in social affairs as a feasible method of survival. Specifically, he adopted Zhuangzi's methods, i.e. showing a stupid and dissolute appearance, and roaming between the capable and the incapable, in order to survive. He said:

[In a chaotic time], when one has no place to retire, one should keep quiet like a fool, be simple like a dissolute. Being a man of letters, besides mountains and streams, clouds and birds, his topic does not touch on present political affairs; his social circle does not include troublemakers. This is close to what Zhuangzi refers to as staying between the capable and the incapable. (Wang 1996: [10] 618)

Obviously, Wang interpreted “staying between the capable and the incapable” similarly to uttering no evaluation and acting like a fool. He might have understood well that the fruit trees were harmed because of their produce, and the goose were killed because of being unable to cackle. Nevertheless, he did not want to emulate Zhuangzi's dissolute and carefree life-style, but insisted on following the Confucian Way, i.e. one should add to it (Daoist methods) with self-cultivation, and maintain it with uprightness and discipline (Wang 1996: [10] 618). As he continued:

Without losing the mind in the search for good and bright times, one can adopt a method of staying in the dark. Without daring to abandon the mind to bring the world to order, one can leave human beings and cherish his loneliness. (Wang 1996: [3] 471)

These sentences showed that, according to WANG Fuzhi, in order to avoid trouble and danger, Zhuangzi stayed in a dark place and cherished his detached mind by abandoning social responsibility. But Wang would rather stay in a dark place and cherish detachment only as a temporary survival method in order to carry out his goal in the future—to seek good times and restore the world to order. He thus differentiated himself from Zhuangzi with his Confucian concern.

In order to restore the world to order, Wang chose to preserve and spread the seed of humaneness and righteousness, realizing though that it was impossible to restore the Ming dynasty to power. His faith was that a harmonious society was held together, not by power, but by the people's humaneness and love. If a powerful warlord were to conquer the world by force and stratagems but failed to govern by humaneness and ritual propriety, his rule would not be lasting. By this standard, he praised the scholar Guan Ning (管寧, 158-241C.E.) for his efforts to preserve the sprouts of humanity, righteousness, and ritual propriety in society during the chaotic Three Kingdoms period, observing that, "Chinese society in the late Han and the Three Kingdoms period was not held together by the warlords Liu Bei (劉備), Sun Quan (孫權) and Cao Cao (曹操), nor by the ministers Xun Yue (荀悅) and Zhuge Kongming (諸葛孔明). It was held together by [the propriety of] Guan Ning" (Wang 1996: [10] 346). Implicitly, he did not think that the Manchu's cruelty and governance would last long, and he would restore the Chinese world with his humaneness and righteousness under the Manchu control.

WANG Fuzhi described the work of preserving humaneness as "storing it up for future use (*chu tianxia zhi yong* 儲天下之用)." He had no expectation that his ideals would be adopted by the Manchu regime of the time. He denied the legitimacy of Manchu rule, calling the Manchus bandits and usurpers, confident he was serving the Way of the late sage kings 先聖王之道—the Yellow Emperor (黃帝), Shen Nong (神農), Shun (舜), and Yu (禹) who had warded off bandits, thieves, birds, and beasts. In this, Wang displayed the moral courage of Mencius (孟子—371-289 B.C.E.) and stayed dedicated to the Way of the late sage kings during the period of Manchu rule. In this spirit, he ridiculed Zhuangzi (莊子—c. 399-295 B.C.E.) for not upholding the Way of the sages in facing the dangers and risks of the Warring States period, saying "Zhuang Zhou (莊周) was horrified by the chaos of his time and just wished to be a useless tree. He advocated being useless and did not uphold the things that would be most useful in the future" (Wang 1996: [10] 69).

After stating his method of survival according to moral principle and righteousness, Wang first explained that Zhuangzi and his sages abandoned social responsibility because they feared harm or death. He said:

Zhuang Zhou compared serving a tyrant to raising a tiger in Chapter 4 of *Renjian Shi*, admonished being cautious in behavior and appearance, as vigilant and fearful as walking in the range of the skillful archer Yi's (羿) arrow. Truly it is so. But I do not agree with him. Zhuang Zhou's analogy shows that he was excessively fearful and became the companion of death. (Wang 1996: [10] 545)

Indeed, Zhuangzi had compared a tyrant to a tiger, and asked the ministers to be cautious in dealing with him. But it was wrong to conclude that Zhuangzi was excessively fearful and became the companion of death. In *Renjian Shi*, Zhuangzi continued proposing "the fasting of the mind (*xinzhai* 心齋)" which transcended any deliberation on life and death and maintained an empty mind. How could Wang disregard this and tailor Zhuangzi's words to fit his criticism?

Nevertheless, he went on to laugh at Zhuangzi's method of survival as impracticable and harmful. He stated:

Zhuang Zhou thought he was skillful in interacting with evil people. He proposed methods such as dealing with a fierce tiger, behaving like a baby, describing the human world as the inescapable range of Yi's arrow, and insisting that a true man will not be drowned even though a huge flood reaches the sky. The coward hears these and loses his principles more. A wild person hears them and commits more evils. The only reason is that these methods lead one to lose oneself, and give too much weight to external things. (Wang 1996:[10] 677)

Here, Wang accused Zhuangzi of losing himself and letting external things decide the process. That is, Zhuangzi was too concerned with external things and situations, and forgot his own capability to control and guide the process. Zhuangzi could not maintain composure in front of crisis and danger.

As is known, Zhuangzi's methods can be divided into two levels. The first level is to deal with danger and crisis in real life. One should be cautious about danger at every moment, and this is why he compared the human world with the dangerous range of Yi's arrow. When dealing with cruel and evil people, one should not only have one's principle but also behave according to the situation. The second level is to transcend danger and crisis through uniting with Dao and discarding life and death. At this level, one would be able to avoid drowning even though the flood reached the sky, for one already looked at life and death as one. Understanding Zhuangzi's standpoint, it will be obvious that Wang used Zhuangzi's second idea to attack the first idea when he suggested that Zhuangzi proposed to leave life and death to fate. But there is a deeper implication behind Wang's words. He was expressing his Ming loyalist standpoint and his determination to preserve the Ming culture. In order to carry out his course, he would rather die than surrender to the threat of the Manchu.

WANG Fuzhi compared himself to a male pheasant to emphasize his Ming loyalist status. In his words, "Having colorful feathers but not showing off, the pheasant already loses the function of its colorful feathers; likewise, being able to crow but keeping quiet, how can I become a noble person?" (Wang 1996: [3] 322) He believed that one should display one's ability and talent in order to fulfill the meaning of human life. If one had the ability but did not use it, it would be the same as losing the ability. Therefore, as a man of letters and a Ming loyalist, the meaning of his life lay immediately in preserving his Ming costume and transmitting the Ming culture, and preserving the seed of humaneness and ritual propriety in the long run.

To elucidate this idea better, Wang compared human life to an arrow. Just as an arrow's function was to shoot for example, the meaning of human life was to serve human society and promote human relationships. Therefore, one should not fear death and failure when undertaking duties, just as one should not fear missing the target and wasting an arrow when shooting prey. He argued:

To catch a pheasant, an arrow is shot...To shoot, one is likely to lose the arrow because of missing the target; but not to shoot, one will lose the arrow too. Although one does not lose the arrow by not shooting, yet not shooting is identical with losing it (for it loses the function of arrow). Shooting the arrow, one does not care about its loss. Targeting the pheasant, one does not necessarily expect to catch it. Then the sage truly has the arrow and the pheasant... For those fearing being used as ox in sacrifice or turtle in divination, they think they keep the arrow through not shooting. But without shooting, the arrow does not match its

name, and the name “arrow” does not correspond to its function. If what they keep will not be an arrow any more, what is the need to keep it? (Wang 1996: [1] 961–962)

This passage discloses that the meaning of a man's life is to fulfill his duties. If he does not fulfill his duty, he is not a true human being, just as an arrow is a true arrow in fulfilling its function in shooting. Wang did this because he would rather sacrifice his life for the preservation of the Ming culture. If he could not preserve the Ming culture and maintain his anti-Manchu position, his life, whether short or long, would be meaningless. For this reason, he criticized Zhuangzi for his failure to realize the meaning of human life although he avoided dangers and harm and saved the body as a whole.

## 6 Criticism on Zhuangzi's Concept of Free Excursion

WANG Fuzhi did not think that Zhuangzi's concept of free excursion was in accordance with his anti-Manchu mission and his preservation of the seed of humaneness and righteousness for the future, so he criticized Zhuangzi's concept of free excursion from two perspectives—fearing difficulties and shunning responsibility—both of which were thought of as originating from Zhuangzi's selfishness.

First, Wang insisted that Zhuangzi tried to keep distant from human affairs in order to secure his life and freedom. He stated:

Zhuangzi discussed free excursion once he opened his mouth. It was understandable that he looked on official rank and salary as useless. In the end, he just avoided fame and penalties, and reached the highest realm that he lost his self-assertive consciousness listlessly (*da ran sang ou* 嗒然喪耦). (Wang 1996: [6] 701)

When Zhuang Zhou talked about free excursion, he would enjoy it if the situation permitted. Without being harmed, he went his way freely, and did not mind that the elm and fang (枋) were small while the dark sea was large. (Wang 1996: [2] 390)

The first quotation indicates that Zhuangzi achieved free excursion through avoiding fame and penalties, rank and salary. The second criticized him as an opportunist, one who lacked principle and distinction in order to achieve free excursion. For Wang, free excursion was not the whole meaning of human life. A person should have his own principle and pursuits, instead of simply preserving a live body and avoiding harm. For this reason, Wang concluded that Zhuangzi did not grasp the due measure of things but shrank from social duties.

In the end, the teachings of Buddhism and Daoism are all insufficient and cannot pass over the mean. Even though they listlessly lose their egos (self-assertive consciousness), wander lively and freely, face the stone wall for nine years and have no place to rest their minds, they all shrink from duties and hide in laziness, leaving so many social affairs undone. (Wang 1996: [6] 795)

Against this, WANG Fuzhi proposed that one should be satisfied with one's social status and duties and accept what one ought to do. To achieve this purpose, one

should abide by Confucian humaneness and ritual propriety. As he said, “If a person prevents himself from being eccentric, he should discipline his behaviors with a settled rule, keeping himself from unhealthy behaviors. This rule is ritual propriety” (Wang 1996: [6] 427). With ritual propriety as a standard, Wang redefined free excursion as a realm abiding by principle, not just avoidance of harm.

Second, Wang assumed that Zhuangzi was insincere and selfish when talking about free excursion. He defined insincerity in terms of using one’s calculating mind to achieve selfish interests. He said:

The distinction between heavenly principle and human desire depends on one’s choice of unselfishness and selfishness, sincerity and insincerity. Thus, to complete tasks relating to the military, agriculture, rituals or music, one may do them from the point of either heavenly principle or human desires. To roam in spring wind and bath in the Yi River, one may do so from the point of either heavenly principle or human desires. Once one does a thing with a motive or calculation (*ji* 機), one becomes insincere. It is certain that people do not want to be insincere. What makes them insincere is that they are concerned with their own selfish interests. (Wang 1996: [6] 763)

Wang found that all good things could become an instrument to be used for selfish purposes. As is known, both Laozi and Zhuangzi did their best to persuade people to act without using a calculating mind, and it is surprising that Wang Fuzhi accused Zhuangzi of having a calculating mind when he proposed free excursion. He believed that Zhuangzi’s no-desire was insincere and selfish because Zhuangzi shrank from duties and struggle in order to secure his carefree life. Although he admitted that Zhuangzi was free from desire, he argued:

Although Zhuangzi’s descriptions of free excursion were so delightful and carefree, free and easy, they could not go beyond one word—calculation (*ji* 機). He shrank once there were difficulties, and regarded human society as the range of Yi’s arrow, so his metaphor was no different from the Buddhist metaphor of the human world as a burning house. He did not regard the big bird as free, and neither was the quail free. He did not set his hand on tasks related to the military, agriculture, music and rituals, nor enjoyment in the spring wind or the Yi River, and regarded this non-action as not attaching to external things. (Wang 1996: [6] 764)

In WANG Fuzhi’s view, in order to avoid danger, Zhuangzi was inclined to abandon all social works and enjoyment, and achieved a free mind. Hence, Zhuangzi was selfish. Evidently he made such a conclusion from the perspective of Confucian improvement of social welfare, i.e., an individual achieving the meaning of his life through making a contribution to society. Zhuangzi preserved a carefree mind without caring about social works, so he should be condemned as selfish. However, Wang ignored the outer kingliness of Zhuangzi’s thought. As is known, if one reached the realm of free excursion, one would not only establish oneself, but also establish the myriad things, just as the spiritual person living on the Miao Gu Ye Mountain, who “by concentrating his spirit, can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful” (Guo 1961: 28). Then what is the need to put one’s mind on governance with humanity and righteousness? Zhuangzi found that social disasters arose from too much human interference on the processes of nature and human life, so he rejected the so-called humane measures that Confucians

cherished. Moreover, Wang's undertaking of social responsibility aimed to correct injustice from a consequential aspect, but mainly disregarded the prevention of injustice in advance. This was why he could not refute Zhuangzi well from this Confucian perspective.

Finally, WANG Fuzhi accused Zhuangzi of being selfish because Zhuangzi did not comply with ritual propriety. He said:

Many expansive doctrines Zhuangzi proposed evidently contradict ritual propriety. Zhuangzi just avoided the trace of indulgence and stayed at the realm beyond words, women, goods and interests. After all, his true purpose was nothing but living freely and easily and taking advantage of everything. Because his human desire fell on the side of simplicity and detachment, he went in that direction and took it as his selfish interest... Regarding such feelings and motives, weren't they his selfish desires? (Wang 1996: [6] 769)

At this point, Wang insisted that whether one had many or few desires, one would be regarded as selfish if one did not follow Confucian ritual propriety. But one might wonder what was ritual propriety and how did it come into existence? If ritual propriety arose as the due measure of human feelings and desires in specific situations, how could it be regarded as a fixed standard to evaluate all feelings and desires? Moreover, ritual propriety was established to govern the proper issuance of feelings and desires. If one could express feelings and desires naturally, however, what was the need for ritual propriety? This was why Zhuangzi condemned it as the flowery embellishment (*hua* 華) of Dao and the forerunners of disorder (Guo 1961: 731). In contrast, if a person behaved according to ritual propriety but did not express his feelings sincerely, he would truly be pretentious. Furthermore, Zhuangzi was not the kind who took simplicity and detachment as selfish interest. He just proposed acting in accordance with one's nature and enjoying what one could get in a proper way, just as a horse delighted in treading on frost and snow, in eating grass and drinking water.

## 7 Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it is obvious that WANG Fuzhi tried to remodel Zhuangzi's thoughts for the enrichment of Confucianism. However, due to his anthropocentric and Ming loyalist worldview, he could not absorb Zhuangzi's thoughts well, as they were broader than his and saw all things equally and universally. As a result, when commenting on the *Zhuangzi*, he could not help follow Zhuangzi to understand Dao, non-interference, letting things be as they are, and following the natural course, and so on. However, he did not miss the opportunity to add Confucian ideas to the *Zhuangzi*, and tried to transform Zhuangzi's thought on the Way of the noble person as well. For example, after he interpreted Zhuangzi's notion of assisting Heaven (*xiangtian* 相天) as "assisting the transformation and nourishment of Heaven and earth" in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, he went on to claim that the assistance to Heaven reshaped all Zhuangzi's important concepts and extended free excursion and the cultivation of life beyond individual life to



universal harmony (Wang 1996: [13] 293–294). He accepted Zhuangzi’s understanding of transformation (*hua* 化), but criticized him for his emphasis on death and his ignorance of life (Wang 1996: [6] 750) and his lack of adherence to a constant principle (*zhenyi* 貞一) (Wang 1996: [3] 451–452). However, in his criticism on the *Zhuangzi*, there is evidence that he was influenced by the very book he criticized. He incorporated transformation into his cosmological view to explain the change of human nature, and proposed his famous doctrine, “human nature renews itself as heavenly endowment comes down daily (*ming ri shou ze xing ri sheng yi* 命日受則性日生矣)” (Wang 1996: [2] 301). He used Zhuangzi’s notion of non-interference and compliance with the natural course to interpret Confucian “non-action (*wuwei* 無為).” In his view, the sage just stayed in his place and dealt with all things according to their nature. Without calculation or any trace of administrative measures, observing the people’s intention from their behaviors, removing their excess and checking the harm they caused, the sage would reform the popular ethos without incurring any complaint (Wang 1996: [1] 870–871).

WANG Fuzhi mainly criticized Zhuangzi for his laziness, irresponsibility and selfishness. In particular, he spent much time on criticizing Zhuangzi’s teaching of transcending right and wrong and free excursion. Besides his orthodox Confucian standpoint, Wang feared more that Zhuangzi’s teachings would weaken people’s loyalty to the Ming and lessen their hatred to the Manchu. He likened a minister’s loyalty to his ruler to a wife’s devotion to her husband; having made such a commitment, one should accept it as one’s destiny, to share in life through thick and thin, without thought of separating (Wang 1996: [3] 318). Angered by the positive reception of the Manchu emperor Kangxi (康熙) and the popularity of Manchu drama in Suzhou in 1684 (Zhou and Peterson 2002: 407), Wang cast the common people as no better than birds and beasts, devoted solely to “seeking food, spouse, and shelter,” over which they would fight lest threatened by the death penalty (Wang 1996: [12]:478). Such reflections strengthened his resolve in rejecting Zhuangzi’s teaching of transcending right and wrong and the Buddhist doctrines of emptiness and illusion. He feared that such amoral teachings could justify anyone becoming the emperor and legitimize the Manchu conquest of China.

WANG Fuzhi’s sympathetic understanding of Zhuangzi mainly resulted from his classification of Zhuangzi as a Confucian disciple. Although he put Laozi and Zhuangzi into one group, he saw Zhuangzi as ZI Zhang’s (子張) disciple (Wang 1996: [6] 609). As is known, ZI Zhang was one of Confucius’ disciples. He thus saw Zhuangzi as an ardent (*kuangzhe* 狂者) who had not forgotten his Confucian heritage (Wang 1996: [13] 294). He even accepted Su Shi’s 蘇軾 claim that Zhuangzi openly attacked Confucius but secretly supported him (Su 1993:670). As a result, he praised Zhuangzi as one of the great hundred scholars and believed that his thought could be converted into Confucianism.

WANG Fuzhi’s classification of Zhuangzi seems astonishing but actually there is a logic behind it. If we step out of the popular view, which opposes Confucianism to Daoism, and instead see them as two branches growing out of the Zhou culture of rituals and music, we will find that Confucianism is the succession of the Zhou culture while Daoism is its criticism, and Confucianism and Daoism are in a



relationship of mutual criticism and support. It is for this reason that from time to time, Daoism will rise again to correct and criticize Confucianism and restore the vitality of Chinese culture. Therefore, the *Zhuangzi* should not be seen as an “other” to Confucianism, but as one part of it. This explains why WANG Fuzhi evaluated it highly.

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# Chapter 21

## Inner Alchemy and Mystical Experience in the *Zhuangzi*



Kei Yeung Luk

### 1 Introduction

In the past few decades, studies of the *Zhuangzi* have been conducted from diverse perspectives. The main trend is for scholars to approach the *Zhuangzi* from the perspective of their own familiar intellectual traditions, such as skepticism or relativism.<sup>1</sup> However, they have also begun to investigate and unlock the significance of those mystical discourses, which they believe can be found throughout the text, by discussing their implications and analyzing the conditions that gave rise to the mystical experiences.<sup>2</sup> Among these scholars, Lee Yearley uses the term “intraworldly” to illuminate the nature of the mystical experiences in the *Zhuangzi*. He suggests

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<sup>1</sup> See Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996. For a classification and brief review of the major research on the *Zhuangzi* from the perspectives of skepticism and relativism, see Liu 2006: 154–156.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Kohn 1992: 52–8 and Clarke 2000: 140–59. For the contribution of the *Zhuangzi* to the Chinese mystical tradition, Livia Kohn states “Chinese mysticism took its basic system from the *Zhuangzi*, whose metaphors and expressions were widely used as technical terms in the later tradition” (Kohn 1992: 52). This chapter holds that the contribution of the *Zhuangzi* to the Chinese mystical tradition is far beyond the extent of what Kohn describes.

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Earlier version of this chapter was read at the Third International Conference on *Quanzhen Dao and Lao-Zhuang Studies* (第三屆全真道與老莊學國際學術研討會), Research Centre of Taoism, Huazhong Normal University, Wuhan, China, March 25–27, 2016.

The work described in this book chapter, was substantially supported by a grant from the College of Professional and Continuing Education, an affiliate of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

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that the value of Zhuangzist Mysticism lies in the innovative perspective it offers to adepts to re-experience the normal world and to understand it in new ways. According to Yearley, unlike Christian and Hindu mysticism, in which one pursues “union” or “unity” with the Absolute Reality (i.e. God and Brahma), intraworldly mysticism does not allow for connection to the transcendent realm (Yearley 1983: 130–1; 1996: 160; 1982: 445). The type of knowledge corresponding to the Zhuangzist mystical experience relates merely to the phenomenal world and the adept has no interest in pursuing truth in a metaphysical sense (Yearley 1982: 446). This chapter holds a very different view on the *Zhuangzi*. Textual evidence is sought in order to argue that the *Zhuangzi* does contain an exploration of the interconnection between the metaphysical realm (i.e. *Dao* 道) and the phenomenal world. In particular, such evidence is found in the text’s discussion of inner alchemical theory. Yearley’s discussion of the *Zhuangzi* is confined to its exploration of phenomena only, thereby losing its unique, crucial implications for the transcendent realm. The interpretation he proposes obviously cannot escape from the narrowness of the dominant characterization of Zhuangzi’s philosophy as skeptical and relativistic.

## 2 Intraworldly Mysticism

This section discusses Yearley’s interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* from the perspective of intraworldly mysticism. Before discussing the perspective in detail, his definition of mysticism and the background theory he uses to categorize various kinds of mystical experience will be elucidated. Yearley claims that a mystical experience is an “experience that the experiencer believes reflects contact with a higher reality or with the true character of reality” (Yearley 1983: 130), which differs significantly from their experiences in everyday life. Mystical experience then falls into three types: (1) Real Contingency, which derives from the three major monotheistic religions; (2) Monism, for which the Hinduism of southern Asia is representative; and (3) Change-only, for which the thought of Zhuangzi is representative. Each type of mystical experience provides different ways of interpreting and making sense of apparent changes in this world (Yearley 1982: 439–40). Real contingency maintains that the world is composed of an eternal, constant, and transcendent Reality (i.e. God) and contingent but real phenomena; the former serves as the ontological basis for the latter. God empowers the meanings and values of existence in this world with his will, which means all phenomena actually exist; however, they are contingent and limited since not only are the necessity and forms of their existence not obligatory, but they cannot completely reflect the excellence of God either. The changing phenomena and the transcendent Reality constitute a paradoxical worldview: all the affairs in this world can be regarded as important and unimportant. They are important and should be taken seriously because their authentic existence partially reflects the holiness of God. On the other hand, they are unimportant because people must recognize that their ultimate life goal remains to relate themselves to the non-contingent God instead of to incomplete worldly phenomena (ibid. 441). Due to the differences between the subject and God in nature, there is an unsurpassable gap

between the two; however, a mystic can enhance the richness of his or her experience with an external force by achieving union with God. More importantly, in the union between subject and transcendent Reality, the individuality or uniqueness of a mystic will be enhanced rather than weakened or overwhelmed, and they will not feel they are losing themselves in the process (Yearley 1983: 130). Such a process and experience, in the eyes of Yearley, is similar to Dante's view of Heaven as conveyed in *Paradiso* from the *Divine Comedy*, which provides a detailed description of Heaven and an encounter with God (ibid. 130–1).

Like real contingency, monism holds that the world is constituted by a constant, eternal, transcendent Reality (i.e. Brahma) and contingent phenomena. However, there is a critical difference between these two worldviews. Monism does not claim that phenomena are real. On the contrary, the world of experience comprising contingent and mutable existence, including the existence of any particular human, is illusory and essentially worthless. As the world of experience is not a real world, all pursuits in it are meaningless and just bring distress to people. Genuine value can only be obtained through unification with Brahma (Yearley 1982: 442). This is because the nature of the connection between subject and transcendent Reality, in the monistic view, is “unity” but not “union.” “Unity” implies an undifferentiated combination of things, such as salt dissolved in water or water drops merging with the ocean. It suggests that a subject eliminates his or her illusory features through religious practice: the real-self that emerges from the transcendent Reality can be revealed and absorbed into Brahma, which is the sole reality of the universe (ibid. 444; 1983: 131). Such connection differs significantly from that of the real contingency type in which the individuality or uniqueness of the subject will be empowered through mystical experience. As the real-self of each person originates from Brahma, who creates the world, a person need only rip off his or her illusory self to accomplish unity with Brahma (ibid.). It also differs greatly from the mystic in the real contingency type because, in the latter, one needs God's help, but cannot achieve a perfect mystical experience through his or her own effort alone.

Yearley argues that Zhuangzi's thought represents the change-only type, which significantly departs from the other two types in both worldview and the nature of mysticism. Change-only insists that the world of contingency and ever-changing experience is the only real world. Therefore, neither a non-contingent reality as the initial cause of and constant maintainer of the world through creation and empowerment (Yearley 1982: 440), which is posited by real contingency, nor a sole reality, as the only truth behind the world of illusory phenomena, as proposed by monism, exists. Things change not because of reasons hidden behind phenomena, but because of a contingent random series of events. It is just speculation to believe in the existence of any eternal and unchanging reality that supports or underlies change (ibid. 442–3). This worldview affords an “intraworldly” mystical experience which allows people not only to conceive their normal experience from an innovative perspective enabling them to understand and appreciate the ephemeral but true character of the ever-changing phenomena, but also to reorient themselves in relation to this truth (ibid. 445). Unlike the previous two types of mysticism, the intraworldly mystic seeks no unification with any kind of transcendent Reality.

This framework leads to a kind of perspectivist epistemology of authentic knowing that lacks an objective reference for either the knower or the known (ibid. 446): normal knowledge involves knowing that something is the case by referring to a fixed object at a specific time and place or in a specific context. Since the change-only model holds that anything discussed is just a part of the ever-changing process, people will not be capable of understanding the real phases of the world by focusing only on just one phase of that process (ibid. 446–7). Therefore, in order to understand the world, we should neither depart from an invariable standpoint nor focus on a fixed object. Yearley elaborates the nature of such knowing as the perception of “hold and let go” and draws an analogy with a viewer who just focuses on the frame flashed in front of him when watching a movie (ibid. 448). As it is only true at that moment, people should pay full attention on it; on the other hand, if the current condition changes, one should leave it behind without regret (ibid. 445, 448). This kind of perception is different from that of the real contingent type, which holds that everything is contingent and separate from God. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt an attitude that does not totally reject nor fully engage in the world. It is also different from the monism type, which regards the world as illusory and unreal. Therefore, in addition to handling the necessities of everyday life (e.g. a student should study hard to fulfill his or her responsibility) it negates all the worldly desires in nature (ibid. 447–8).

Yearley’s discussions on the worldview of the *Zhuangzi* derive from the change-only model. The corresponding attitudes people should have when facing changes is obviously reflected in a series of fables in the *Dazongshi* 大宗師 (The great ancestral teacher) chapter (Mair 1994: 51). For example, in the story of the sickness of Zi Yu 子輿 and Zi Lai 子來 and the visit of Zi Si 子祀 and Zi Li 子犁, Zi Yu and Zi Lai display a detached attitude when sickness comes to them. This is in sharp contrast with Zi Lai’s wife, who is scolded by Zi Li because of her sadness at her husband’s death and resistance to change (Guo 2007: 258–62). In addition, Zi Gong 子貢 attends the funeral of Zi Sang Hu 子桑戶, and, feeling unwell when he sees Meng Zi Fan 孟子反 and Zi Qin Zhang 子琴張 singing in the presence of the corpse, questions whether it is appropriate to sing at such an occasion, highlighting the obvious contrast between their attitudes towards death (ibid. 264–7).<sup>3</sup> The discussion about not holding any rigid or fixed viewpoints is related to the analysis of the interdependence and mutual causation of binary opposites: *shi* 是 (this) and *bi* 彼 (that) (ibid. 66), and the fundamental differences between the *yinshi* 因是 (“that’s it” which goes by circumstances) and *weishi* 為是 (“that’s it” which deems) (Graham 2001: 11, 52–4, 106–7; 1969–70: 143–4) approaches to thought and action in the chapter *Qiwulun* 齊物論 (Discussion on equalizing things, or Equalizing discourses on things). Yearley suggests that there are two sets of impressive images or metaphors in the *Zhuangzi* that can explicate the connotation of and conditions for achieving the intraworldly mystical experience concretely (Yearley 1996: 161–2), namely the

<sup>3</sup>A similar metaphor is in the *Zhile* 至樂 (Supreme happiness) chapter regarding Hui Shi 惠施 finding Zhuangzi sitting with his legs sprawled out, pounding on a tub and singing when his wife had been passed away (Guo 2007: 614–5). Translations are mine unless stated otherwise after the original source.

*huanzhong* 環中 (center of the ring) in the *Qiwulun* and *Zeyang* 則陽 chapters, as well as the discussion of the Ultimate Man (*zhiren* 至人), who uses his *xin* 心 (heart-mind) like a mirror in the chapter *Yingdiwang* 應帝王 (Responses for emperors and kings) (Mair 1994: 66).<sup>4</sup> The reason Zhuangzi elaborates his ideas with images and metaphors instead of normal language, according to Yearley, is because he understands that language and normal knowledge itself rests on dichotomies or the notion of oppositions (Yearley 1983: 132; 1996: 161). The use of normal language for elaboration would inevitably mean he wouldn't be able to free himself from such binaries, just as the Confucians and Mohists could not free themselves from their discriminating minds (Yearley 1996: 160). The "center of the ring" conveys the idea that the axis of a wheel or the hinge of a door should be positioned in the center, metaphorically expressing that the subject no longer needs to busy him- or herself back and forth in order to affirm and appreciate "this" or deny and abhor "that." Likewise, he or she can free him- or herself from dichotomy in order to respond to any condition appropriately, just as the motionless center of a rotating wheel can respond to whatever happens (ibid. 161; see also Yearley 1983: 132). Yearley points out that the discussion of such a spiritual state can be also found in the *Zeyang* chapter (Yearley 1996: 161), while mentioning that Mr. Ran-xiang 冉相氏 "[has] other things and he had no end nor start, no 'How long?' and no time. To be transformed day by day with other things is to be untransformed once and for all [...] there has never yet begun to be Heaven, never yet begun to be man, never yet begun to be a Beginning, never yet begun to be things" (Graham 2001: 110–1).<sup>5</sup> In the *Dazongshi* chapter, the Crookback Woman claims that her experiences have led her to conclude "that which kills off the living does not die, that which gives birth to the living has never been born. As for the sort of thing it is, it is there to escort whatever departs, is here to welcome whatever comes, it ruins everything and brings everything about. Its name is 'At home where it intrudes.' What is 'at home where it intrudes' is that which comes about only where it intrudes into the place of something else" (ibid. 2001: 87; see also Yearley 1996: 161).<sup>6</sup> It is necessary for us to pay attention to the fact that Yearley follows the two quotations above with A. C. Graham's translation of *yingning* 櫻寧 (at home where it intrudes), which describes a harmonious spiritual state that can fuse all relative discourse to yield a perspectiveless position from which there is no conflict. Therefore, beginning and end, heaven and people, life and death, fulfillment and destruction, disturbance and intrusion can become indiscriminate, even identical, allowing us to perceive the true nature of reality (Yearley 1996: 161).

The metaphor of "using his heart-mind like a mirror" in the *Yingdiwang* chapter, on the other hand, supplies the conditions that make the intraworldly mystical experience possible (ibid. 162). Allegorizing the heart-mind with a mirror, it indicates that the intraworldly mystic will not be attached to external things nor troubled by internal emotions when perceiving the world. A mirror reflects all the things that

<sup>4</sup>For the original Chinese text, see Guo 2007: 66, 885, and 307.

<sup>5</sup>For the original Chinese text, see Guo 2007: 885.

<sup>6</sup>For the original Chinese text, see Guo 2007: 252–3.

appear in front of it, conveying the idea that if a mystic can remain open to and accepting of different viewpoints without any prejudice by abandoning the dualism of normal language, he will not be affected by the changes in the external world (ibid.; 1983: 133). In addition to reflecting things as they are like a mirror, the heart-mind also reflects all emotions and judgements internally: when they are emerging, their emergence is perceived; when they are vanishing, the disappearance of mental activities are perceived. The heart-mind remains sober and sensitive without being hampered. Moreover, such emotions or judgments will not be transformed into an outward desire for or repulsion from things. In other words, the mystic will not be troubled by feelings or dispositions (Yearley 1983: 134). As to the matter of the *xinzhai* 心齋 (fasting of the heart-mind) discussed by Confucius and Yan Hui 顏回 in the *Renjianshi* 人間世 (In the world of men) chapter (Watson 1968: 54), Yearley claims it concerns the condition of accomplishing this extraordinary spiritual state. The *xu* 虛 (empty/tenuous) and *shen* 神<sup>7</sup> of the “fasting of the heart-mind” indicates the non-discriminatory and dualistic heart-mind and the highest possible spiritual fulfillment of the mystic (Yearley 1996: 154).<sup>8</sup> If we approach it with Yearley’s interpretation of Zhuangzi’s notion of the three levels of the self, obtaining the condition of *shen* by virtue of the spiritual cultivation of *xu*-ness implies that the abandonment or dissolution of the drives of disposition and reflection that allow the supreme “transcendent drive” to guide people to act or respond effortlessly and skillfully, is accompanied with a feeling of ease, contentment and comfort.<sup>9</sup> A person who acts in this way is always able to maintain a clear, tranquil and unobstructed heart-mind like a mirror, as well as being able to reach the goal more effectively without the need of extra labored effort (ibid. 172–3). Moreover, when empowered by the transcendent drive, the person acting in this way enjoys both the pleasure of the internal unification between their mental and physical attributes as well as the sense of harmonious interaction between his- or herself and the external world (ibid.). It should be noted that being guided by the transcendent drive causes the normal self to disappear, the individual therefore having no sense of self (ibid. 154). Such feeling emerges because the other two drives are suppressed or erased by the domination of the transcendent drive, unlike the mystic experience of the monistic type discussed above in which the mystic erases his or her individuality or uniqueness through religious practice, and is united with the transcendent Reality

<sup>7</sup>From a grammatical point of view, the word *shen* can be a noun or adjective in the context of the *Zhuangzi*. Both Watson and Mair translate this concept as “spirit,” see Watson 1968: 168–70 and Mair 1994: 145–7. Graham has “daemon” or “daemonic,” see Graham 2001: 265–7, 287. The meaning of this concept will be examined in detail in Section Four of this chapter.

<sup>8</sup>For the original Chinese text, see Guo 2007: 147, 150.

<sup>9</sup>A “dispositional drive” implies a natural desire (for example food and libido) or social norm (the respect of elders and caring for the young) that drives people to behave towards people and matters instinctually without thinking. A “reflexive drive” implies the capacity for self-reflection on reviewing the appropriateness of behavior or inclination originating from a “dispositional drive.” For example, when I was infuriated, the “reflexive drive” allowed me to reflect on whether this infuriation was appropriate or not. Eventually it may lead me to change of my judgement or action (Yearley 1996: 153–4).



into which he or she dissolves.<sup>10</sup> What kind of substantial practices should a mystic follow to free him- or herself from the dualism rooted in normal language in order to achieve such a condition of mystical experience? Yearley supposes that the discussion of the “fasting of the heart-mind” between Confucius and Yan Hui, as well as Zi Qing’s 梓慶 chipping wood in preparation to make a bellstand indicates that some regimen of training, such as meditation and the cultivation of *qi* 氣 through breath control, should be involved.<sup>11</sup> However, these practices, as Yearley points out, are not discussed in the *Zhuangzi* in detail (ibid. 175).

In sum, when Yearley discusses “intraworldly mysticism,” he stresses that such mystical experiences need not be built on the connection between the mystic and any kind of transcendent Reality. As the world in front of one is the only real world, the mystical experience can only be sought after and achieved in the empirical world. Therefore, the value of the Zhuangzist mystical experience is embodied by the mystic who grants new meanings to experienced phenomena. We can even say that it is a kind of religious or philosophical system grounded in the phenomenal world that allows one to obtain contentment in the phenomenal world.

### 3 *Qi* and Its Cognates and Metaphysical Foundations

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter holds a very different view to Yearley’s interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* from the perspective of intraworldly mysticism. According to Yearley’s argument, the *Zhuangzi* puts no effort into exploring the interconnection between the metaphysical realm and phenomenal world, instead it is merely a study of phenomena from a limited immanent perspective. This section draws on the work of several scholars in order to discuss the ontological basis of the transformations of the corporeal form of the mystic in terms of inner alchemical processes. The discussion, firstly, supplies evidence proving that exploration of the interconnection of metaphysical realm and phenomenal world are indeed one of the primary concerns of the text; and secondly, provides details about the training regimes arguing that it is negligent to believe that they are not thoroughly discussed in the *Zhuangzi*.

It is undoubtedly the case that, as Yearley points out, the *Zhuangzi* mentions some training regimes that are related to mystical experience, such as meditation, contemplation, and *qigong*-like 氣功 practice. The references to Daoist cosmology,

<sup>10</sup>When Kim-chong Chong discusses Yearley’s notion of “transcendent drive,” he mentions that the condition of self-oblivion and the experience of pleasure can be explained by the “theory of flow” in the field of psychology (Chong 2011: 345–6 note 37). Hence, regarding the force of the self-drive discussed in Yearley’s notion of the “transcendent drive,” it should be similar to his conception of an intraworldly mystical experience without any involvement or connection to transcendent Reality. For the application of the “theory of flow” to the significance of *wuwei* 無為 (effortlessness), see Prycker 2011 and Barrett 2011.

<sup>11</sup>For the original Chinese text of the fable of Zi Qing, see Guo 2007: 658–9.

as in the elaborations in the chapters of *Zhile* and *Zhibeiyou* 知北遊 (Knowledge wanders north) (Mair 1994: 210), indicate that the universe is pervaded by nothing but *qi* and that things come into existence and vanish due to the gathering and dissolution of *qi*. As a member of the world, a human is no different from any other thing, and as such is also constituted from *qi* (Guo 2007: 614–5, 733). In essence, the human is one with the world; therefore *qi* is the medium that connects human and world together. The discussion about the ability of the mystic to perceive the true nature of, or acquire “true” knowledge about, the world through the practice of *qi* can be seen in the dialogue between Liezi 列子 and the Barrier Keeper Yin 關尹 in the *Dasheng* 達生 (Mastering life) chapter (Watson 1968: 197). The conversation begins with Liezi’s question about how the Ultimate Man “can walk under water without choking, can tread on fire without being burned, and can travel above the ten thousand things without being frightened” (ibid. 198) (潛行不窒, 蹈火不熱, 行乎萬物之上而不慄) (Guo 2007: 633). Yin makes sense of the miracles by referring to the Ultimate Man’s accomplishments of nurturing his own *qi* (*yangqiqi* 養其氣) and guarding his own pure *qi* (*chunqizhishou* 純氣之守). Moreover, in Yin’s discussion about the questioning of the “thing” (*wu* 物), he asks “how could any one of them be worth considering as a predecessor?” (Watson 1968: 198) (夫奚足以至乎先?) (Guo 2007: 634). This can be understood as implying that a thing cannot be the ontological basis of another thing’s form. Furthermore, according to Yin’s elaboration, the practice of *qi* allows the mystic to connect the existence of “no form” (不形) with the “no change” (無所化) that creates all things (ibid. 634), which should be taken as the metaphysical foundation of the world. It is worth noting that the mystic can accomplish the condition of *Tian* 天 (Heaven) and his *shen* “has no flaw” (Watson 1968: 198) (其神無郤) (Guo 2007: 634) by connecting such metaphysical existence through the cultivation of certain practices. It is then a state of spiritual fulfillment that allows the mystic to come and go spontaneously, as if he or she were “wander[ing] where the ten thousand things have their end and beginning” (Watson 1968: 198) (遊乎萬物之所終始) (Guo 2007: 634) without conflict or disharmony with anything. Last but not least, Liezi’s question is about the cultivation and condition of the Ultimate Man; however, Yin answers him by discussing how the issue relates *qigong*-like practices to the cosmological processes of the transformation of no form into the creation of a universe with form. Yin’s discussion on the matter of cultivation practices combined with the cosmological elaboration of the creation and evolution of the universe proves that everything in this world is constituted by *qi*. Such combined discussions can also be found in a conversation between Lao Dan 老聃 and Confucius in the *Zhibeiyou* chapter (Guo 2007: 741).

From the above textual analysis, various issues have arisen that need to be further clarified: What is the metaphysical origin of this world? What substantial process transforms no form to form? What is the relation between the concept *shen* and this metaphysical origin? And what does the concept *shen* mean in the *Zhuangzi*? In order to answer the latter two questions regarding the concept of *shen*, it is first necessary to answer the former two questions. The answers to the former questions might be determined from the above mentioned conversation between Lao Dan and

Confucius in the *Zhibeiyou* chapter regarding the supreme *Dao* (*zhidao* 至道). Just as Yin answered Leizi's question by first referring to the discussion of cultivation practices, Lao Dan also requires Confucius to prepare himself by fasting and practicing austerities for the purpose of purifying his heart-mind and "*jingshen*" 精神<sup>12</sup> before instructing him. Lao Dan then provides a cosmological explanation of how the universe began by pointing out that "the bright and shining is born out of deep darkness; the ordered is born out of formlessness" (Watson 1968: 238) (昭昭生於冥冥, 有倫生於無形); the "*jingshen* is born out of the *Dao*; the shaped is born originally from the *jing* 精; and that myriad things give birth to one another through their forms" (精神生於道, 形本生於精, 而萬物以形相生) (Guo 2007: 741).<sup>13</sup> Regarding the discourse on the creation of the universe in the quotation above, Lai Hsi-san 賴錫三 has a very inspirational interpretation of it. He points out that the outline of *Dao* can be divided into two structures. One is the phenomenal world of "the bright, shining and ordered" and the metaphysical world of "the deep darkness and formlessness." The other is the evolutionary process through which the *Dao* gives birth to *jingshen*; the *jingshen* gives birth to *jing*; the *jing* gives birth to form and shape; and finally the myriad things give birth to one another (Lai 2008: 122–3). From Lai's clarification, it is certain that a *qi*-related transformation process has been demonstrated, i.e., the metamorphosis of *qi* from the pure and fine, formless and shapeless, prenatal condition ("...there is no trace of its coming, no limit to its going. Gateless, roomless") (Watson 1968: 239) (其來無跡, 其往無崖, 無門無房) (Guo 2007: 741) to the coarse and concrete postnatal condition of appearance in the beings with eight orifices (*baqiaozhe* 八竅者) or nine orifices (*jiuqiaozhe* 九竅者) (ibid.).

The ambiguity of the word *qi*<sup>14</sup> can indeed be seen throughout the *Zhuangzi*. First, there is the *qi* with phenomenal implications, such as "the four seasons each differ in *qi*" (Watson 1968: 290)<sup>15</sup> (四時殊氣) (Guo 2007: 909) and "*Yin* and *Yang* the greatest of *qi*" (Graham 2001: 151)<sup>16</sup> (陰陽者, 氣之大者也) (Guo 2007: 913) in the *Zeyang* chapter. Furthermore, there is the "*qi* of heaven" (*tianqi* 天氣), the "*qi*

<sup>12</sup> Watson translates the compound *jingshen* as "inner spirit" or "pure spirit," see Watson 1968: 238. Graham has "quintessential-and-daemonic," see Graham 2001: 132, 286. Mair has "essence" or "spiritual essence," see Mair 1994: 215.

<sup>13</sup> Watson mentions that due to the ambiguity of the concept *jing* in the context of the *Zhuangzi*, it is difficult to bring it out in translation. It can be translated as "spiritual essence," meaning the vital energy of the body. Being an adjective in the compound *jingshen*, it would be translated as "pure spirit," i.e., vital or essential spirit. When it appears as a noun, it can be translated as "essence," or "purity" (Watson 1968: 170 note 2). For comparison, Graham translates it as "quintessence." See Graham 2001: 177–8, 286. The significances of the concept *jing* will be examined in detail in the next section.

<sup>14</sup> There are various translations of *qi*, Watson translates as "breath," see Watson 1968: 32, 121, 290. Graham has "energy," see Graham 2001: 44, 151. Mair has "vital breath," see Mair 1994: 5, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Since this section intends to discuss the significances of *qi*, I follow Watson's translation of the phase but keep the concept without translation.

<sup>16</sup> I follow Graham's translation of the phase but keep the concept *qi* without translation.

of earth” (*diqu* 地氣) and the “six *qi*” (*liuqi* 六氣)<sup>17</sup> (Guo, p. 386) in the *Zaiyou* 在宥 (Let it be, leave it alone) (Watson 1968: 114) chapter and “changes of the six *qi*” (六氣之辯) (Guo 2007: 17) in the *Xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊 (Wandering freely) chapter. There are also *shiqi* 恃氣 (rely on their nerve) (Watson 1968: 204)<sup>18</sup> and *shengqi* 盛氣 (swell with rage) (Graham 2001: 136)<sup>19</sup> in the *Dasheng* chapter (Guo 2007: 655), *zhiqu* 志氣 (intent and energy) (Graham 2001: 238)<sup>20</sup> in the *Daozhi* 盜跖 (Robber Zhi) chapter (Guo, p. 1000) and *qi* as the expression of “temperament” or “attitude” in the *Gengsangchu* 庚桑楚 chapter (Watson 1968: 259; Mair 1994: 234).<sup>21</sup> All these refer to emotional responses and instinctual impulses of human beings; therefore, they surely belong to the phenomenal realm. In addition, there is the compound *shenqi* 神氣 which can be found in the *Tianzifang* 田子方 chapter; it suggests that the Ultimate Man “peers into the cerulean sky above and descends into the Yellow Springs below. Though he roams to the eight ends of the universe, his *shenqi* undergo no transformation” (Mair 1994: 206, 208)<sup>22</sup> (上闕青天, 下潛黃泉, 揮斥八極, 神氣不變) (Guo 2007: 725). The sense of the quotation is that the attribute of *shenqi* awards its possessor the ability to transcend the limitations of both space and time, which implies that it is transcendent in nature and similar or even identical to the eternal nature of the prenatal *qi*, which is formless and shapeless but nevertheless is able to make up the whole universe. It is worth mentioning that other than the meanings derived from the discourse on cultivation practice, *shenqi* can also be expressed in various cognates, such as *jingshen* or *shenming* 神明 in the text, which communicate its ontological and cosmological implications. First, let us discuss the compound *jingshen*. The previous quotation of the discussion about the supreme *Dao* between Lao Dan and Confucius in the *Zhibeiyou* chapter indicates that the cleansing and purifying of one’s own *jingshen* (*zaoxue er jingshen* 澡雪而精神) (ibid. 741) is a necessary condition for a person who wishes to reach an epiphany and that *jingshen* is the foundation of *jing*, from the *qi*-related transformation process. It shows that the ambiguity of the compound means on the one hand, a kind of *Dao*-like *qi* that serves as the metaphysical foundation of creation and the transformation of things and on the other, a critical attribute or condition that allows a mystic to embody the *Dao*. If *jingshen* can be practiced and manifested, it can allow the individual to have the mystical experience of perceiving the origin and true nature of the universe.

Discussion of the compound *jingshen* and its cognates, such as *shen* and *shen*-nature *jing*, can also be found in passages of the *Zhuangzi* outside the *Zhibeiyou*

<sup>17</sup> I have found that the compounds *tianqi* 天氣, *diqu* 地氣 and *liuqi* 六氣 in the *Zaiyou* chapter can also be named as “*jing* of the heaven and earth” (*tian dizhi jing* 天地之精) (Guo 2007: 379) and “*jing* of the Six *qi*” (*liu qizhi jing* 六氣之精) (Guo 2007: 386) in the same chapter.

<sup>18</sup> For comparison of the translation, see Graham 2001: 136 and Mair 1994: 181.

<sup>19</sup> For comparison of the translation, see Watson 1968: 204 and Mair 1994: 181.

<sup>20</sup> For comparison of the translation, see Watson 1968: 330 and Mair 1994: 304.

<sup>21</sup> For the original Chinese text, see Guo 2007: 810.

<sup>22</sup> I follow Mair’s translation but keep the key concept *shenqi* without translation. Mair translates it as “spirit and vitality.”

chapter. For example, further elaboration of the connotations of these cognates can be found in the combined discourses in the chapters of *Keyi* 刻意 (Finicky notions) (Graham 2001: 264) and *Tiandi* 天地 (Heaven and earth), which illustrate that in the mystical experience achieved in “tallying with the grading which is Heaven’s” (ibid. 266) (合於天倫) the mystic can both become one with his *shen* (*yushenweiyi* 與神為一) and let his *jing* course through him “without obstruction” (ibid.) (一之精通) (Guo 2007: 546). Such oneness with one’s own *shen* and *jing* is also called “*shen*-ousness of the *shen*,” through which one “can perceive *jing*” (Mair 1994: 105)<sup>23</sup> (神之又神而能精焉), which is a kind of in-depth consciousness or mode of extrasensory perception that enables the mystic to perceive without seeing and hearing in the “deepness upon the deep” (深之又深) (Guo 2007: 411). To uncover and activate this in-depth consciousness, it is necessary to cleanse the factors that obscure the *jingshen* – “gifts and wrappings, letters and calling cards” (Watson 1968: 356) (苞苴竿牘) (Guo 2007: 1047), something stated in the *Lieyukou* 列御寇 chapter. Under the context of the interrelation between the cultivation of *qi* and the fulfillment of *shen*, which was shown in the previous quotation from the *Dasheng* chapter regarding the dialogue between Liezi and the Barrier Keeper Yin, practicing meditation with the principle of “nurturing the *shen*” (養神) (ibid. 544) and “only with the *shen* do you abide” (Graham 2001: 266)<sup>24</sup> (惟神是守) (Guo 2007: 546) leads to a transformation and refinement of the very nature of one’s own postnatal *qi* in the midst of the mystic’s body, which finally becomes as pure and fine as the prenatal *qi* of *Dao*. The *qi* of *Dao*, according to the previous description in the *Zhibeiyou* chapter, serves as the metaphysical basis for all existence in the cosmological and ontological sense; therefore, such transformation and refinement allows the mystic to enjoy the experience of transcending space and time arising from “the Beginningless” (Watson 1968: 356) (無始) (Guo 2007: 1047). During such an experience his *jingshen* “courses in the four directions, flows on with everything, is everywhere unconfined; it borders heaven above, coils round earth below” (Graham 2001: 266) (四達並流, 無所不極, 上際於天, 下蟠於地) (Guo 2007: 544). It is also possible for the mystic to realize that his *Dao*-like *jingshen* actually serves as the metaphysical basis for all things, something metaphorically expressed in the line: “transforming, nurturing and cultivating all things in the world” (化育萬物), but “cannot be conceived as an image” (Graham 2001: 266) (不可為象) (Guo 2007: 544).

By reviewing the discussions of another cognate compound *shenming* in the text, there is reason to believe that its metaphysical meanings are the same as those of *jingshen*. The *Qiwulun* chapter mentions that the general perplexity of people derives from the ignorance of their *shenming*, which tends to be obscured by intelligence and intrigue (*lao shenming weiyi* 勞神明為一) (Guo 2007: 70). The implication is that the unobscured condition of *shenming* belongs to every individual and can be regarded as the essence of the human. In addition, there are two crucial points regarding *shenming* from the *Tianxia* 天下 (The world) chapter that are

<sup>23</sup> I follow Mair’s translation but keep the cognates discussed here without translation.

<sup>24</sup> I follow Graham’s translation but keep the key concept *shen* without translation.

worth paying attention to. First, *shenming*, was an attribute, property, or state that was shared and retained by the all virtuous “ancient time of men” (古之人) – Barrier Keeper Yin and Lao Dan, and Zhuang Zhou 莊周 – as the common core content of life in metaphorical expressions such as “peers of the *shenming*” (Graham 2001: 274)<sup>25</sup> (配神明) (Guo 2007: 1067), “serenely swelling alone with the *shenming*” (Graham 2001: 281) (澹然獨與神明居) (Guo 2007: 1093), and “setting out with the *shenming*” (Graham 2001: 282) (神明往與) (Guo 2007: 1098) respectively. Second, in the context of discussing the limited perspective of ordinary people, the expression “there are few who are able to have the whole glory of heaven and earth at their disposal, and speak of the full scope of the *shenming*” (Graham 2001: 275) (寡能備於天地之美, 稱神明之容) (Guo 2007: 1069) shows that *shenming* like *tiandi* 天地 (heaven and earth) can also be seen as a kind of external object which exists independently of people.<sup>26</sup> In the *Zhibeiyou* chapter, on the other hand, *shenming* is described as “the greatest purity” (Watson 1968: 236) (*zhijing* 至精). Being formless, shapeless, and the metaphysical grounding for all existences in which “things as vast as the Six Realms have never passed beyond the border...; things as tiny as an autumn hair must wait for it to achieve bodily form” (ibid. 237) (六合為巨, 未離其內; 秋毫為小, 待之成體). Furthermore, it exists eternally and ubiquitously (扁然而萬物自古以固存) (Guo 2007: 735). Obviously it is the same with *jingshen* in the meanings and implications mentioned in the discussion between Confucius and Lao Dan regarding the supreme *Dao* in the same chapter that refers to a kind of metaphysical *qi* condition that cultivates and nurtures the ten thousand things. The above textual analysis shows that *shenming* implies *jingshen*, both of which connote a *Dao*-like *qi* condition that provides the metaphysical grounding for

<sup>25</sup> For the following three descriptions of *shenming* in the *Tianxia* chapter, I follow Graham’s translation but keep the compound without translation. Graham translates it as the maladroit phrase “daemonic-and-illuminated.”

<sup>26</sup> With reference to a series of literature like the *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States), *Shanhaijing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas), *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents), *Taiyishengshui* 太一生水 (Great One Birthing Water), Chang Heng 張亨 suggests that the concept *shenming* in the *Tianxia* chapter originates from the tradition of *Wu* 巫 (shaman) history in the land of *Chu* 楚 in Southern China. Concretely speaking, *shenming* is transformed from the deity *Donghuang Taiyi* 東皇太一 (The Great One, Lord of the Eastern Sky) in the *Jiuge* 九歌 (Nine Songs) of the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Verses of *Chu*) and the deities worshipped in the land of *Chu*. Therefore, Chang believes that it is inappropriate merely to take the symbolic meaning of *shenming* to explain that it is a kind of mental or spiritual state. Instead, the concept should be regarded as a deity with a certain status. Accomplishing the realm of genuine freedom and liberty of the heart-mind through the cultivation practices, such as being effortlessness and unattached to anything, the spirit of the deity will enter the body of the mystic, who can ascend to the realm of *Dao* then (Chang 2012). This chapter argues that in the *Zhuangzi*, *shenming* is a kind of *qi* condition which is very close to or even identical to the most refined and purest *qi* of *Dao*. Although such an interpretation of *shenming* is different from Chang’s, his discussion of the concept *shenming* regarding its concreteness and religious implications can serve as verification of my belief that it is an ambiguous term referring to both an objective, metaphysical *qi* condition, in the sense of cosmology and ontology, and the refined *qi* condition of inner alchemy that can be accomplished by the mystic through Daoist meditation practice.



the external universe and can be achieved through the inner alchemical practices of the mystic.

#### 4 The Significance of *Jing* and Kinds of Mystical Experience

The implications of *jingshen* in the process of the transformation of *qi* have been discussed above. The meanings of the concept *jing*, which forms tangible things, born originally from the *jingshen*, will be now investigated. The ambiguity of the concept can be fully appreciated by considering the episode in which the Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi* 黃帝) asks Guangchengzi 廣成子 about the matter of “the *jing* of supreme *Dao*” (至道之精) (Guo 2007: 379) in the *Zaiyou* chapter. According to Guangchengzi, it has features that transcend the limitations of time and space: it is “deep and darkly shrouded” (Watson 1968: 119) (窈窈冥冥), “mysterious and hushed in silence” (ibid.) (昏昏默默) (Guo 2007: 381), “inexhaustible” (Watson 1968: 120) (無窮) and “unfathomable” (ibid.) (無測) (Guo 2007: 383). According to Chinese cosmology, *yin* and *yang* become the *qi* that constitutes things. As for “the *jing* of supreme *Dao*,” it is also the source of both the supreme *yin* (*zhiyin* 至陰) and the supreme *yang* (*zhiyang* 至陽) (Guo 2007: 381), obviously serving as the metaphysical ground for the combination of *yin qi* 陰氣 and *yang qi* 陽氣 in the formation of things. Likewise, the concept *jing* of “the *jing* of supreme *Dao*” is identical with *jingshen* and *shenming*, as discussed above with reference to the meaning of the theory of existence. Secondly, although the Yellow Emperor asks Guangchengzi about “the *jing* of supreme *Dao*,” actually he is concerned about “[the] aid [of] the five grains” (佐五穀), in order to “nourish the common people” (養民人) and to “insure the growth of all living things” (Watson 1968: 118) (遂群生) with “the *jing* of heaven and earth” (天地之精) (Guo 2007: 379). Guangchengzi rebukes him for mentioning “*yin* and *yang*” because they are “things in their divided state” (Watson 1968: 118–9) (物之殘) (Guo 2007: 380), which he does not consider worthy of discussion. This is because the *jing* of “the *jing* of supreme *Dao*” is identical to the most refined and purest prenatal *qi*; whereas the *jing* of “the *jing* of heaven and earth,” comparatively speaking, is the coarse and concrete postnatal *qi* in the realm of phenomena. Since they belong to a different hierarchy, their implications are not the same, and so Guangchengzi reprimands him. It is clear that the concept also implies the very nature and essence of things in the phenomenal world. Thirdly, after the Yellow Emperor has understood that governing the body is crucial to the mastery of the supreme *Dao*, Guangchengzi mentions the practice of meditating to halt the functioning of the conscious mind in the manner of “not labor[ing] your body” (無勞女形) and “not churn[ing] up your *jing*” (Watson 1968: 119)<sup>27</sup> (無搖女精) in order to achieve a state in which “the eye does not see, the ear does not hear, and the mind does not know” (ibid.) (目無所見, 耳無所聞, 心無所知) (Guo 2007:

<sup>27</sup> I follow Watson’s translation of the statement but keep the concept *jing* without translation.



381). The more each one is practiced, the more skillful one will become; such purification of the consciousness will promote the maintenance and refinement of the *jing* of the practitioner. Then, it becomes possible to convert one's own postnatal *qi* into prenatal *qi*. Eventually, the practitioner will be able to return to the origin, to merge with the *Dao* and to become immortal. Since accomplishing such a process depends upon the transformation of one's own *qi*-nature *jing*; the concept also implicates the meaning laden in the discourse of cultivation practices.

These three different meanings of *jing* can be found throughout the *Zhuangzi*. The first meaning can be seen in the expressions: "the supreme *jing* has no form" (*zhijing wuxing* 至精無形) (ibid. 572) and "what is the most *jing*-ous that it is formless" (*jingzhiyuwulun* 精至於無倫) (ibid. 916) in the chapters of *Qiushui* 秋水 (Autumn floods) and *Zeyang*, respectively.<sup>28</sup> The second meaning occurs, for example, in the expression "the *jing* of mountains and rivers" (山川之精) (Guo 2007: 359, 527), which is found in both the *Quqie* 肱篋 (Rifling trunks) (Graham 2001: 207; see also Watson 1968: 107) and *Tianyun* 天運 (Heavenly revolutions) (Mair 1994: 130) chapters. Moreover, the *Zaiyou* chapter also mentions a kind of "*jing* of the Six *Qi*" (六氣之精) that can "bring nourishment to all living creatures" (Watson 1968: 121) (育群生) (Guo 2007: 386). In the chapter of *Qiushui*, there are discourses concerning things with shape and form that can be classified as *jing* (pure, fine) and *cu* 粗 (coarse, crude), and each can be expressed and conveyed through languages and ideas (ibid. 572). Likewise, approached from the classification of things which are small and large in size, and *jing* and *cu* in their nature in the *Tianxia* chapter (ibid. 1067, 1084), it can be proved that even the postnatal and phenomenal *qi* out of which things are formed can also be categorized as the comparatively purer and finer or coarser and cruder versions. The third meaning can be frequently read in the descriptions of the cultivation practices in the text. For example, the chapters of *Keyi* and *Tianxia* emphasize that *jing* is crucial to the enhancement or preservation of one's quality of life – the Sage treasures it (*shengren guijing* 聖人貴精) (ibid. 546) and the Spirit Man (*shenren* 神人) never finds himself apart from it (*buliyujing* 不離於精) (ibid. 1066). The importance of *jing* to the fullness and completeness of life can also be observed when Zhuangzi rebukes his friend, Hui Shi 惠施, who wears his own *jing* away (Graham 2001: 82)<sup>29</sup> (勞乎子之精) (Guo 2007: 222) in the *Dechongfu* 德充符 (The sign of virtue complete) chapter (Watson 1968: 68). On the other hand, the relationship between *xing* 形 (form/body) and *jing* is discussed in both the *Keyi* and *Dasheng* chapters (Guo 2007: 542, 632), proving that this kind of *jing*, just like our body, is phenomenal. However, the term "being able to shift" (Watson 1968: 198) (能移) (Guo 2007: 632) in the *Dasheng* chapter indicates that the nature of *jing* is actually changeable and has the potential to transform into metaphysical existence. According to the descriptions in the text, what makes such a transformation possible is the practice of meditation, through

<sup>28</sup> For the phrases of *zhijing* 至精 and *jingzhi* 精至 in the chapters of *Qiushui* and *Zeyang* respectively, Lai Hsi-san illuminates them as the "absolute and affirmative expression" (絕對肯定的表達) of the purest and finest *qi* (Lai 2008: 127).

<sup>29</sup> I follow Graham's translation of the statement but keep the concept without translation.

which the practitioner pauses the operation of the outer consciousness in order to avoid laboring his body (*xingbulao* 形不勞) and exhausting his *jing* (*jingbukui* 精不虧) (ibid. 632). By attaining the spiritual state of “utmost void” (虛之至) and “utmost tranquility” (靜之至) (ibid. 542), both the body and *jing* can be rejuvenated (*xingquan jingfu* 形全精復) (ibid. 632). Then, the life force can be conserved to motivate the *qi*-nature *jing* of the body to be continuously purified (*jingzhiyoujing* 精之又精). Eventually, all the postnatal *qi* in the body is transformed into prenatal *qi*, allowing the practitioner to return to his origin and merge with the *Dao*; this process is metaphorically expressed by saying he becomes “the Helper of Heaven” (Watson 1968: 198) (反以相天) (Guo 2007: 632).

Now that I have examined and clarified the ambiguity of the concepts *qi*, *jing*, *shen* and their compounds and cognates in the text, I would like to discuss the specific kinds of mystical experience that the Zhuangzist mystic can achieve after completing a return to the origin. There is no difference in nature between the corporeal condition of the practitioner after completion of the reversal meditation practice (i.e. the refined *qi*-condition of *jingshen* or *shenming* discussed above) and the condition of the *qi* of *Dao*; therefore, according to the description of the experience of embodying *Dao* in the *Zaiyou* chapter, this miraculous corporeal condition will lead the mystic to experience the dissolution of the cognitive barrier that divides the self from things, to transcend the dualistic boundary between subject and object, to become one with the Absolute (i.e. *Dao*), and to become aware of his or her participation in the transcendent Unity (倫與物忘, 大同乎溟漠) (Guo 2007: 390).<sup>30</sup> These unique and extraordinary experiences allow the mystic to perceive the world without the use of their sense organs. The details of such extrasensory perception are illustrated in several episodes in the *Zhibeiyou* chapter. The parable in which *Nieque* 齧缺 (Gaptooth) asks *Beiyi* 被衣 (Reedcoat) about the *Dao* (Graham 2001: 160), for example, indicates that when the surface layer of the mystic’s consciousness completely stops – expressed by saying that the mind is like dead ashes (*xinruosihui* 心若死灰) – another more authentic, fundamental, and inner layer of consciousness begins to function (*zhenqishizhi* 真其實知) (Guo 2007: 738). The phrase “*shen* will come to lodge in you” (Graham 2001: 160)<sup>31</sup> (神將來舍) (Guo 2007: 737) seems to signify such an occurrence. On the other hand, the reply of Confucius to Ran Qiu’s 冉求 question: “Is what preceded heaven and earth knowable?” (Graham 2001: 164) (未有天地可知乎?) points out that sensory perception, which is called the non-*shen* (*bushen* 不神) mode, and extrasensory perception, which is called the *shen* mode, are so different that it is impossible for them to perceive the world as the same world (Guo 2007: 762).<sup>32</sup> As the operation of the non-*shen* perceptual mode is rooted in the dualistic system of discourse in daily life, it is unable to comprehend

<sup>30</sup> Watson translates this phrase as “forget you are a thing among other things, and you may join in great unity with the deep and boundless” (Watson 1968: 122). For comparison, also see Mair, 1994: 99.

<sup>31</sup> I follow Graham’s translation of the phrase but keep the concept *shen* without translation.

<sup>32</sup> There is an abstruse expression “I’ve only heard of people knowing things through awareness, never of people knowing things through unawareness” (Mair 1994: 33) (聞以有知知者矣, 未聞以

the condition of “what preceded heaven and earth,” i.e. the unpartitioned prenatal *qi* of *Dao*. What is seen in this perception is only separate things in the world that are distinct from each other. On the contrary, *shen* perception is a much more reliable and fundamental consciousness that allows a person to obtain insight into the overall truth instantly, and that doesn’t distinguish between the knower and the knowable.<sup>33</sup> Without any contrast between the subject and object, this type of perception allows the mystic to completely merge with things and to obtain an epiphany of selflessness and oneness, explicated as without knowing “how far I’ve gotten” (不知其所至), “where to stop” (不知其所止), “when the journey is done” (不知其所終), and “where it will ever end” (Watson 1968: 241) (不知其所窮) (Guo 2007: 752) in the response of Zhuangzi to Dongguozi’s 東郭子 question “Where does the so-called *Dao* exist?” (所謂道，惡乎在?) (ibid. 749). The description of the functioning of extrasensory perception can also be found in the *Keyi* chapter, which mentions that the mystics “[become] one with [their] *shen*” (與神為一) (ibid. 546) and their *jingshen* “courses in the four directions, flows on with everything” (Graham 2001: 266) (四達並流，無所不極) (Guo 2007: 544). The undifferentiated nature between the inner corporeal *qi* of the mystic and the external *qi* of the universe makes their interpenetration perceptible; therefore, the mystic can perceive the true nature of the universe, as Yang Rur-Bin states, by using their *qi*-permeated body instead of their normal sense organs.<sup>34</sup>

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无知知者也) (Guo 2007: 150) in the *Renjianshi* chapter. I think it refers to the sensory perception (i.e. non-*shen*) mode and the extrasensory perception (i.e. *shen*) mode respectively.

<sup>33</sup>Yang Rur Bin mentions that there is such a “direct awareness that can thoroughly reflect the whole in a single moment” (一時洞照全體的直覺) in the description of the experience of embodying *Dao* in the *Zhuangzi*. However, he does not indicate specifically which concept in the text it refers to (Yang 2003: 91). I think such “direct awareness” refers to the concept *shen* in the *Zhuangzi*. Yang’s paper was translated by Cook from the Chinese original: 楊儒賓,〈從「以體合心」到「遊乎一氣」~論莊子真人境界的形體基礎〉, 第一屆中國思想史研討會論文集—先秦儒法道之交融及其影響 (台中:東海大學文學院, 1989), 185–212. The discussion of the difference and interrelation between sensory perception and extrasensory perception in the *Zhuangzi* can be seen as the precursor and prelude of the investigations of *shishen* 識神 (cognitive spirit) and *yuanshen* 元神 (original spirit) by the later Daoist texts, such as the *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Chapters on Awakening to Perfection) of the Southern school of the *neidan* 內丹 (inner alchemy) tradition during the late tenth to eleventh centuries. For an introduction to the doctrines and complete translations of the *Wuzhen pian*, see Cleary 1987. For a concise introduction of the text, see Pregadio 2011. This book was translated from the Chinese original: 王沐,〈悟真篇丹法旨〉, 悟真篇淺解:外三種 (北京:中華書局, 1990), 257–315. For selected translations of the text, see Pregadio 2009.

<sup>34</sup>Yang proposes a very insightful interpretation of the characteristic of conscious activities of the mystic while achieving embodiment of the *Dao* in the *Zhuangzi*. With reference to the literature of *Liezi*, *Wenzi* 文子, *Guanzi* 管子, *Lushi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Matser Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals), and *Zhunnanzi* 淮南子, he suggests that before the embodiment of the *Dao*, it in the domination of the sensory perception the subject uses different sense organs (eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and more) to perceive the world. Then, after the embodiment of the *Dao*, he or she uses the body permeated with *qi* consciousness to perceive the world (Yang 2003: 109–114).

## 5 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to examine the cognates of concepts relating to the metaphysical grounding of the universe as well as the spiritual and corporeal conditions of the mystic, such as *qi*, *jingshen*, *shenming*, *jing*, and *shen* in the *Zhuangzi* in order to show that Yearley's characterization of Zhuangzist mysticism as an intraworldly type, in which the connection between the mystic and the transcendent Reality is not acknowledged, is culturally embedded and owes more to the trend treating Chinese philosophy as anti-transcendental, as described by J. J. Clarke,<sup>35</sup> than to any textual evidence from the *Zhuangzi*. The discussion in Section Three and Four demonstrates the ambiguities of these concepts, for example, the different stages of the *qi*, as the transformation of the universe and the metamorphosis of *qi* during the inner alchemical process of the practitioner. Although these cognate concepts denote ambiguous dimensions, a consistent thread running through the discussions of these two main themes can be found under the context of the *qi*-based cosmology and ontology in the *Zhuangzi*. As the *Zhuangzi* contains the dimension of exploration of the metaphysical world, and the mystic experiences a state of selflessness while achieving the embodiment of the *Dao*, according to Yearley's categorization of mystical experience, Zhuangzist mysticism is more similar to the monism type, such as Hinduism, in which "unity" between the transcendent Reality and the mystic is achieved. Although there are similarities between Zhuangzist mysticism and the monistic type of mysticism, whether they are equivalent to each other is still a matter for further investigation. For example, the monistic type possesses an obvious inclination to negate the phenomenal world and insists it is illusory and worthless in nature. Yet, in the *Tianxia* chapter, when discussing the thought of Zhuang Zhou, it is described as "... [it] was not arrogant towards the myriad things" (不敖倪於萬物) (ibid. 1098–9) and also "... [it] got along with conventional people" (Graham 2001: 283) (以與世俗處) (Guo 2007: 1099). Moreover, the *Zhibeiyou* chapter states clearly that the ubiquitous *Dao* manifests itself in everything, including even the aspects of existence that are conventionally understood as the most inferior (Komjathy 2014: 107), for example in "shit and piss" (Guo 2007: 749–50). Therefore, from Zhuangzi's attitude of assuring the world, we see that it accords with the claims of the real contingency type, particularly that the phenomenal world is real and possesses meanings and values.

Lee Yearley believes that the goal of the Zhuangzist mystical experience is not to seek connection with the transcendent Reality. Instead, the mystic maintains a harmonious heart-mind like a mirror that can tolerate different perspectives and can abide changes in accordance with the shifts in environment. As Zhuangzist mysticism belongs to the change-only type, the phenomenal world is the only real but

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<sup>35</sup> For a review and comment on the "anti-transcendent" notion among scholars in the interpretation of Daoist thought, see Clarke 2000: 147–9, 159–65.

ever-changing world; therefore, it is impossible to grasp the reality of the world or obtain the truth about the world unless through an adaptable and non-dualistic heart-mind. In respect to Yearley's conception of Zhuangzist mysticism as discussed above, I believe that it is saturated with the perspectivism and relativism of Chad Hansen's interpretation of Zhuangzi's thought.<sup>36</sup> Hansen hypothesizes that one of the distinctive features of classical Chinese is that the language does not denote any truth and does not possess the semantic functions of representation and description (Luk 2013: 639), but is instead a pragmatic instrument for guiding behavior. He then argues that the meaning of "*dao*" discussed throughout the pre-Qin period is actually a kind of "prescriptive discourse" rather than a cosmological or metaphysical concept with implications for the theory of existence.<sup>37</sup> Hansen claims Zhuangzi was a perspectivist who profoundly understood the relativity of various language systems. The significance of Zhuangzi's *dao*, according to Hansen, is to remind people that all the distinctions, judgments, and evaluations we make are from some perspective, an accepted or arbitrary practice of distinguishing and naming (Hansen 1983a: 50). Since there are actually many different and indexical guiding *daos*, none of which has priority (Hansen 1992: 282), we should appreciate that all languages, all ways of distinguishing and naming are possible and be flexible, ensuring that we don't "[get] locked into one [that] makes us unable to see the benefits (and defects) of others" (ibid. 284). When discussing the major argument of the *Qiwulun* chapter, Hansen explains:

I here argue simply that the traditional assumptions about Taoism do not form a coherent framework for understanding this particular chapter. Either Taoism is not a theory about a single, absolute entity called "The Tao" or this chapter of the *Chuang-tzu* is not an expression of Taoism. I will offer and argue for an interpretation of the text in question which does not presuppose any claims about an absolute tao/way. Chuang-tzu is a relativist and not an absolutist, that is, he is best understood as speaking of many taos, and taos are to be understood as ways (i.e., prescriptive discourses). Confirmation of this interpretive theory consists in showing that the text is explained more coherently by the theory that "tao" has the same denotation as "discourse" than by the theory that "tao" denotes a mystical, monistic, incommensurable absolute (Hansen 1983a: 31).

<sup>36</sup>Yearley asserts clearly in his works that Hansen's view on the pragmatic nature of the Chinese language has much influenced his thinking on classical Chinese views of knowledge and the interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*. See Yearley 1983: 126, 138 note 2; 1996: 157, 178 note 8.

<sup>37</sup>For the discussion of the differences in grammatical form and corresponding ontology between Indo-European languages and classical Chinese, see Hansen 1983b, 1992: 1–56. For Hansen's view on the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy and how it relates to the Chinese theories of language, see Hansen 1975, 1985. For the meaning and significance of the concept "*dao*" in the context of Chinese philosophy, see Hansen 2003. One of my papers examines the fundamental significance of the *Laozi*, and compares it with Hansen's interpretation of the Laozian concept of *Dao*. I argue that his view of Laozi's *Dao*, which asserts that Laozi promoted the abandonment of all prescriptive discourses and the value orientations that accompanied them, fails to agree with the basic meaning of the text. See Luk 2013.

As discussed in Section Three, the unpartitioned prenatal *qi* of *Dao* serves as a cosmological and ontological basis of existence, indicating that perhaps the denotation of *Dao* is not constant and is variable as proposed by Hansen (ibid. 37).<sup>38</sup> However, this is not to suggest that this chapter agrees with his argument that *Dao* is a linguistic-oriented concept that isn't related to a theory about existence or cosmology which conveys messages about the metamorphosis of things. There are differences between Yearley's and Hansen's interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* – for example, on the issue of whether Zhuangzi's thought is interested in the metaphysical realm or not, Hansen's position is positive. Nevertheless, he believes the metaphysical nature of *Dao* is manifested only in a context where *daos* serve as a pragmatic instruments for guiding people's behavior. Meanwhile, Yearley takes a negative position, arguing that Zhuangzi's thought is an intraworldly type that regards the phenomenal world as the only real world. From this perspective, the value of Zhuangzist mysticism does not need to be established through an examination of the metaphysical world. Yet they both agree that the major argument of the *Zhuangzi* does not lie in an exploration of origin and metaphysical basis of existence from the perspective of cosmology and ontology, respectively.<sup>39</sup> This chapter stakes out a very different view from that of Hansen and Yearley, who believe that the *Zhuangzi*'s significance is that it illuminates the relativity of language systems, the manner of interpreting the world from diverse perspectives, and how to obtain guides for action or the pursuit of pleasant experiences while interrelating with the world in a flexible and tolerant manner. From the above textual studies and analyses of the cognates of *qi*-related concepts, I have argued instead that the text's significance lies in its description of a thorough-going series of cultivation practices, through which it is possible for the mystic to convert the *qi* in the body in order to return to, and to merge with, his or her origin, i.e. the *Dao*.

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<sup>38</sup> Harold D. Roth holds a similar view on the denotation of *Dao* that it does not refer to a “static metaphysical absolute,” but rather a “continuously moving unitive force” (Roth 2003: 17).

<sup>39</sup> Besides the “anti-transcendental interpretation” of the *Zhuangzi* by Yearley and Hansen, Clarke points out that David Hall and Roger Ames also believe that “the notion of transcendence is indeed largely irrelevant to the interpretation of classical Chinese texts, and they argue that Daoist and Confucian texts and systems of thought have been profoundly misunderstood by being transposed into such terms” (Clarke 2000: 161). For Hall and Ames' major argument regarding the pragmatic nature of *Dao*, see Hall and Ames 1998: 147–86, 244–52. By comparing the differences between the Western and the Chinese modes of thinking, Hall and Ames characterize the Chinese thinking mode as “first problematic, or alternatively, analogical or correlative thinking,” which is described as “neither strictly cosmogonical nor cosmological in the sense that there is the presumption neither of an initial beginning nor of the existence of a single-ordered world. This mode of thinking accepts the priority of change or process over rest and permanence, presumes no ultimate agency responsible for the general order of things, and seeks to account for states of affairs by appeal to correlative procedures rather than by determining agencies or principles” (Hall and Ames 1995: xvii–xviii).



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# Chapter 22

## Zhuangzi and Religious Daoism



Livia Kohn

### 1 Introduction

Zhuangzi has remained relatively obscure, in contrast to Laozi, who was elevated to divine status under the Han (Seidel 1969) and became part of the central Daoist trinity, the Three Pure Ones (Sanqing 三清), in the middle ages. While he is still a major deity of religious Daoism with a number of major sanctuaries today (Kohn 1998), Zhuangzi, the second major thinker of philosophical or literati Daoism, is of much less importance in the other two dimensions of Daoism, religious or organized as well as longevity or self-cultivation. He is honored as a thinker and writer and inspirational master, but has no particular lines of worship or outstanding immortal exploits, thus occupying a secondary level of sanctity.

By the same token, in contrast to the *Daode jing*, which was already recited as a sacred text in the Han dynasty and has been prominent in the Daoist religion ever since, inspiring seekers and lay followers, priests and longevity practitioners alike (Kohn and LaFargue 1998; Kohn 2015a), the text *Zhuangzi* never played a role in religious ritual and did not become a sacred scripture until the Tang Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–755) gave it the formal title *Nanhua zhenjing* 南華真經 (Perfected Scripture of Southern Florescence) in 742. At the same time, he also elevated its author—and several other Daoist thinkers, such as Liezi—to sainthood.<sup>1</sup>

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This article is based on chapters 11 and 12 of my book, *Zhuangzi: Text and Context* (Kohn 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Billeter 2008, 258, 2010, 36; Graziani 2006, 29; Mair 2000, 35; Robinet 1983, 61; Yu 2000, 25.

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This is also the period of most Daoist *Zhuangzi* commentaries were written—by masters Lu Zangyong 盧藏用, Li Hanguang 李含光, Liu Zong 柳縱, Shuai Yeguang 帥夜光, Gan Hui 甘暉, Wei Bao 魏包, and Wen Ruhai 文如海 (Kohn 2014, 91). Most others, including the important work by Guo Xiang (d. 312), were penned by literati, artists, or officials, including Song exegeses contained in the Daoist Canon, such as those by Chen Jingyuan 陳景元 (1023–1094), Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (b. 1193) (Boltz 1987, 228). While, therefore, as Jean-François Billeter says, the text “cannot be ranged in any satisfactory manner among any forms of Daoism” (2010, 136), both philosopher and scripture have played some role in religious Daoism, ranging from the elevation of Zhuang Zhou to immortal through the adaptation of *Zhuangzi* concepts in spiritual and mystical pursuits to uses of the text in meditation and self-cultivation contexts. What, then, exactly do we mean when we speak of “religious Daoism”?

## 2 Religious Daoism

Religious or organized Daoism began with a number of revolutionary, millennial movements in the second century CE. Plagued by disastrous circumstances—a succession of floods, droughts, locust plagues, famines, epidemics, and corrupt government—the time saw an overall reduction in China’s population from 60 million in the beginning of the dynasty to 7.7 million at its end (Maisels 1999, 260). While the dimensions of the disaster are hard to imagine, the social processes are fairly well known. As crops failed, people could no longer support themselves and were forced to give up their land and lost their livelihood. Local governments attempted to alleviate the situation by distributing food from public granaries, promising tax relief and lifting restrictions on hunting, fishing, and the use of government forests (Hendrischke 2006, 16). However, before long “the landless became too numerous for public support and there were frequent violent uprisings” (2006, 17). Local shamans got involved, either as advisers to rebel leaders or as messengers from the gods, creating revolutionary and visionary movements in the process. Beginning in the first century CE, they picked up momentum in the second, many insurrections arising especially after 140, “pointing to a weakening of the authority and legitimacy of the ruling dynasty” (2006, 19; Mansvelt-Beck 1986, 337).

Focusing on the arrival of a new world of “great peace” (*taiping* 太平) with the beginning of the next 60-year cycle in 184 CE, some of these movements were more identifiably Daoist than others. Among them, two major organizations stand out: Great Peace (Taiping) and the Celestial Masters (Tianshi 天師), also known as the Way of Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi dao 正一道). Both venerated a deity known as Lord Lao (Laojun 老君)—the representative of Dao and a deified version of the ancient thinker Laozi—who gave their leaders healing powers, nominated them as “celestial master,” and provided instructions on how to form successful communities. The two major leaders, then, were Zhang Jue 張角 in Hebei and Zhang Daoling 張道陵 in Sichuan (Hendrischke 2000, 138–39; Kleeman 1998, 2016).

Both fought vigorously against the Han. In 184, the Great Peace community rose in the central plains, staging the so-called Yellow Turban Rebellion, and was completely destroyed after decades of fighting (Levy 1956). The Celestial Masters wrested a vast territory in Sichuan from Han control, essentially establishing a state of their own. After various skirmishes with up-and-coming local warlords, they submitted to the warlord Cao Cao 曹操 in 215, to be soon forced into exile, moving to various other parts of the country, where they both maintained their religion and mingled with local cults (Hendrichske 2000, 141; Kleeman 2016, 44).

In the southern region of Jiangnan, in the small town of Jurong 句容 next to Mount Mao near Nanjing, they encountered a flourishing religious culture that consisted of eremitic meditation and alchemical practices, later known as the Daoist school of Great Clarity (Taiqing 太清) (Pregadio 2006). Joining forces with these practitioners, they established connections to various divine figures, notably denizens of a superior heavenly realm known as Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清). This led, in the early fourth century, to a series of new revelations that provided descriptions of Highest Clarity and practical methods to get there: meditation, ecstatic soul travel, and alchemical elixirs (Miller 2008; Robinet 1993, 2000; Strickmann 1978, 1981).

Although limited originally to a few aristocratic families in Jurong, the Highest Clarity revelations came to play an essential role in medieval Daoism in two ways. First, one of their disgruntled members branched out and, in the 390s, created his own school, known as Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寶; Bokenkamp 1983). It relied on Han-dynasty cosmology, had a strong focus on ritual and community, and soon spread into larger segments of the population. It also became the major platform for the Daoist integration of Buddhism and the dominant southern school in the fifth century (Yamada 2000; Zürcher 1980). Second, the Daoist master and alchemist Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), later recognized as the schools' first patriarch, set out to collect the original Highest Clarity materials and, around the year 500, created a comprehensive collection known as the *Zhen'gao* 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected, DZ 1016), which put Highest Clarity firmly on the map and elevated it to the leading form of Daoism at the time (Strickmann 1979; trl. Smith 2013, 2020).

It remained in this position throughout the Tang (618–907), when all religions were pressured to create integrated systems of ordination and practice. In Daoism, this became known as the Three Caverns (*sandong* 三洞): the Celestial Masters served as lay practitioners at the base, Numinous Treasure masters were ritual and community specialists in the middle, and Highest Clarity monastics stood at the top and provided the overall leader or patriarch (Benn 2000, 313; Kohn 2001a, 119–120). This time also saw the emergence of a new level of Daoist philosophy and the growth of a flourishing meditation culture, both in close interaction with Buddhism, plus the establishment of Daoism as state-sponsored religion, including Daoist-based examinations as an entryway to officialdom (Kohn and Kirkland 2000, 340).

The integrated medieval system collapsed with the end of the Tang, and various new schools emerged in the Song (960–1260), leading to a renewed flourishing of Daoism. Most important is the school of Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真),

which arose in 1170, became the umbrella organization for all Daoist sects under the Yuan, and is still the leading school in mainland China today (Yao 2000). The Celestial Masters, surviving strongly in Taiwan, on the other hand, are making increasing inroads and have revived their age-old headquarters on Mt Longhu 龍虎山, Jiangxi (Kohn 2009, 123; Goossaert 2021). Aside from ritual worship of deities and purification ceremonies, the main Daoist practice today is internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹), a comprehensive system that integrates many earlier self-cultivation practices and internalizes alchemical practices of old (Skar and Pregadio 2000).

### 3 Zhuang Zhou as Immortal

Within this overall framework Zhuangzi appears variously. His debut as a superior Daoist-type figure is in the alchemical work *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, DZ 1185),<sup>2</sup> by the retired official and would-be alchemist Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), a member of one of the Jurong families that founded Highest Clarity. He first mentions Zhuang Zhou in a discussion of the sage, noting that he makes the point, in *Zhuangzi* 10, that even a robber can attain his own version of sagehood, which therefore is not only a political quality (Ware 1966, 202).

Beyond that, Ge Hong describes Zhuangzi as an inspired master. Like Xu You 許由, who refused the empire under the sage-king Yao, he opted for the reclusive rather than the political life. However, he did not live up to his own teachings (Ware 1966, 19, 41). While expounding that life is but a long dream (*Zhuangzi* 2) and that one should not become buried in office like the hallowed tortoise (ch. 17) or the sacrificial ox (ch. 32), he yet asked the local ruler for food when hungry (ch. 26). “From this,” Ge Hong comments, “we know that he was unable to make life and death equal,” and denounces the text’s presentation as misleading (Ware 1966, 229; Robinet 1983, 61; Kohn 2014, 114).

Despite this rather inauspicious beginning, Zhuang Zhou rose to semi-immortal status in the Highest Clarity revelations. They describe him as a practitioner of Daoist cultivation on Mount Baodu 抱犢山, who ascended to heaven in broad daylight and took up a position in the celestial office of the Great Ultimate. His main Daoist teacher, moreover, was the Mulberry Master (Sangzi 桑子, Changsang gongzi 長桑公子), who also instructed the master physician Bian Que 扁鵲 and the Daoist immortal Jade Master (Yuzi 玉子) (*Zhen’gao* 14.4b; Robinet 1983, 61–62)—also mentioned in various Song sources as well as in the amended edition of Ge Hong’s *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (Biographies of Spirit Immortals) (Campany 2002, 370, 546).

The Mulberry Master, moreover, may relate to a figure in the *Zhuangzi* by the name of Master Sanghu 子桑戶, who lectures Confucius on the importance of blandness—“an optimal and discreet equilibrium where all qualities coexist

<sup>2</sup>“DZ” refers to *Daozang*, the Daoist Canon, a collection of 1500 texts dated to 1445. The numbers refer to the annotated catalog in Schipper and Verellen 2004.

simultaneously” (Jullien and Parkes 1993, 108) in social relations (ch. 20; Watson 1968, 215). He is also one of three masters who pledge friendship on grounds of “roaming the infinite and forgetting life” (ch. 6). At his funeral, Zigong 子貢, sent by Confucius to pay his respects, is scandalized when his friends sing a song in his praise: “Ah, Sang-hu! Ah, Sang-hu! You have gone back to your true form. While we remain as men, oh!” (ch. 6; Watson 1968, 86). Later he appears in both Han and Highest Clarity documents and is known for his magical powers and alchemical recipes (Ngo 1976, 144; Schipper 1965, 107). In addition, Tao Hongjing names Zhuangzi as the leader of three major schools, the other two being Highest Clarity and Buddhism (*Zhen’gao* 19.1a; Robinet 1983, 62), thus recognizing the importance of his work for Daoist cultivation and mysticism.

Zhuang Zhou’s career as Daoist immortal took off more fully after Emperor Xuanzong officially recognized him as major Daoist sage and gave him the title Nanhua zhenren 南華真人 (Perfected of Southern Florescence). He first appears in the *Xianyuan bianzhu* 仙苑編珠 (Garden of Immortals: A Pearl Treasury, DZ 596) by Wang Songnian 王松年 of the early Song dynasty. A collection of 8-character verses for mnemonic purposes (Koffler in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 885–86), it notes that his name was Zhuang Zhou, aka Zixiu 子休, and that he wrote a book in 33 chapters. Citing the first few sentences of the book on the Peng bird flying south, it concludes with the mention of its formal Tang title *Nanhua zhenjing* (3.17b).

In the 1120s, the Daoist-inspired Emperor Huizong (r. 1101–1126), whose *Daode jing* commentary uses numerous *Zhuangzi* citations, largely focusing on peace of mind (Boltz 1987, 214), expanded Zhuangzi’s official stature and bestowed upon him the more elaborate title Weimiao yuantong zhenjun 微妙元通真君 (Perfected Lord of Subtle Wonder and Primal Comprehension) (Mair 2000, 35). In its wake, in 1145, Chen Baoguang’s 陳葆光 *Sandong qunxian lu* 三洞群仙錄 (Record of the Host of Immortals of the Three Caverns, DZ 1248), an anthology that collects extracts from earlier hagiographies (Verellen in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 886–87), mentions Zhuangzi twice: once citing the *Zhen’gao* on his being a disciple of the Mulberry Master, cultivating himself, and ascending to heaven (7.10a); and once with reference to story of the King of Chu offering him a position which he declines, citing the version in his biography in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE) *Shiji* 史記 (Record of the Historian, ch. 63) (8.1a). A more complete copy of the *Shiji* biography plus a mention of his Tang title and a picture appears in Zhao Mengfu’s 趙孟頫 *Xuanyuan shizi tu* 玄元十子圖 (Portraits of Ten Masters of Mystery Prime, DZ 163, 8b–9a), a work that focuses particularly on ancient philosophical figures (Gyss-Vermande in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 894).

The great collection of Daoist immortals, the *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙體道通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror through the Ages of Perfected Immortals and Those Who Embody the Dao, DZ 296) by Zhao Daoyi 趙道一 of the year 1294 (Lévi in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 887–92), has the most comprehensive hagiography of Zhuang Zhou. It follows the *Shiji* to cover basic information, then cites the *Zhuangzi* with two stories on his refusal to serve in office—the turtle “dragging its tail in the mud” (ch. 17) and the sacrificial ox that cannot return to “being a lonely

calf' (ch. 32). It also cites the *Zhen'gao* passage and concludes with listing his Tang and Song titles (6.4a–5a).

Zhang Tianyu's 張天雨 *Xuanpin lu* 玄品錄 (Record of Mystery Ranks, DZ 781) of the year 1335 not only cites the *Zhuangzi* in accounts of various Daoist masters meeting with Laozi (1.3b–6a), but also has a detailed biography of Zhuang Zhou which combines the *Shiji* account with a preface to the text, the *Zhen'gao* note, and the Tang and Song official titles (1.7a–8a). Wang Shizhen's 王世貞 account, finally, in the *Liexian quanzhuan* 列仙全傳 of the year 1600 provides a picture, cites the *Shiji*, and tells the story of the turtle dragging its tail in the mud (1.4b) (Fig. 22.1).

To sum up, although never attaining divinized powers, in the course of history Zhuang Zhou rose to become an established Daoist immortal, with pictures, imperial titles, and hagiographies. Still, the emphasis remained on his refusal to serve in office and his ascension to heaven as first claimed in the *Zhen'gao*. His hagiographic expansion, unlike that of Laozi or other early figures, such as Chisongzi 赤松子 (Master Redpine) or the long-lived Pengzu 彭祖, overall remained rather limited,

**Fig. 22.1** Zhuangzi.  
(Source: *Liexian quanzhuan*)





accounts sticking close to historical documents, anecdotes from his work, and some ascension legends.

#### 4 The Role of the Text *Zhuangzi*

The text *Zhuangzi* follows a rather similar trajectory, although it had a much greater impact, especially on mystical cosmology and conceptualizations of self-cultivation. To begin, the peasant-based millenarian movements of early Daoism ignored it completely, and among fourth-century alchemists it appears only generically as a classical literary work. Thus, Ge Hong does not list it among the titles of his Daoist library (*Baopuzi* 19), but cites it as an ancient philosophical text, which “expounded modeling ourselves on mystery only in general terms” without providing sufficient practical methods (Ware 1966, 142). Tao Hongjing, moreover, structured his *Zhen’gao* in a very similar manner, the first part like the Inner Chapters forming an essential yet gradual introduction (Smith 2013, 4).

In terms of content, the Highest Clarity school adopted numerous expressions and concepts from the *Zhuangzi*, such as “perfected” (*zhenren* 真人), “great clarity” (*taiqing* 太清), “pivot of Dao” (*daoshu* 道樞), “numinous terrace” (*lingtai* 靈台) and the “One” (*yi* 一). It also integrated *Zhuangzi* figures as senior immortals, such as Guangchengzi 廣成子, and worked widely with *Zhuangzi* metaphors, visions of ecstatic flight, and immortals living on pure vital energy (*qi* 氣) (Robinet 1983, 63–67, 73). More specifically, texts of the school variously refer to the big, gnarled tree as a symbol of longevity, use the swamp pheasant as a metaphor for contentment and the refusal to be caged, and apply Cook Ding’s “mystic blade edge” as an expression for true discernment (Smith 2013, 41, 53, 111).

Beyond mere terms, Highest Clarity also adopted major aspects of its worldview directly from the *Zhuangzi*. Thus, it understands Dao as the root and source of all existence, as its “great ancestor” (ch. 6; Smith 2013, 67) and acknowledges the universal impartiality that prevents it from bestowing special favors on anyone or anything (ch. 25; 2013, 141). In addition, the school’s texts connect Dao to the notion of great emptiness (*taixu* 太虛), now a cosmological realm of space and mystery and also the title of a senior deity (2013, 60, 170). Various technical terms regarding the structure of the world, such as the “four seas,” “six energies,” “nine regions,” and “northern sea,” moreover, go back to the *Zhuangzi*, but come to form part of a much more elaborate and complex vision (2013, 34, 228, 254).

Like the *Zhuangzi*, Highest Clarity documents describe the human condition as one of having lost one’s true home, the spirit lodging in the body yet belonging to a higher realm (*Zhen’gao* 2; Smith 2013, 141, 179). Realizing the relative interconnection of all value judgments, such as right and wrong (2013, 165), medieval Daoists as much as *Zhuangzi* followers strive to transcend the realm of mutual dependence in favor of a position of non-dependency (*wudai* 無待) in a state of perfection and complete oblivion, characterized by free flow, ecstatic roaming, and

ascension to the otherworld (2013, 132, 167, 224). Reaching “oblivion in spontaneity,” “upward, I float beyond the purple dawn” (*Zhen’gao* 1, 3; 2013, 67, 173).

All of this, however, does not make the *Zhuangzi* a Daoist text, and it is safe to say that for most of the early middle ages, it remained part of literati culture, finding “its audience among a group of high-class poets and philosophers, cynical skeptics and recluses, and Buddhist writers and translators” (Yu 2000, 22). Only under the Liang dynasty (502–558), the time of Tao Hongjing, did its audience grow to wider segments of the literary world, again flourishing as one of the “three mysteries.” At the same time, Daoists readied themselves for the unification of the empire and strove to present both a powerful school and a unified doctrine acceptable to larger audiences. As part of this effort, they integrated various philosophical and medical texts into their official canon, essentially doubling their stock, a move sharply criticized in the Buddhο-Daoist debates (Kohn 1995, 151–52). Within this context, the *Zhuangzi* appears officially as a Daoist text in the *Xuandu guan jingmu* 玄都觀經目 (Scripture Catalog of the Monastery of Mystery Metropolis), submitted to the emperor in 569, and from here moved into the Daoist section of dynastic catalogs and into the Daoist canon, which records it with various commentaries (Yu 2000, 22).

#### 4.1 Twofold Mystery

In the wake of this move, the text begins to play a more active role in religious Daoism. Its first important appearance occurs in the context of the philosophical school of Twofold Mystery (*chongxuan* 重玄), named after the phrase “mysterious and again mysterious” in the *Daode jing* (ch. 1). As described by the court Daoist Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933) in his extensive *Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi* 道德真經廣聖義 (Extensive Sagely Meaning of the *Daode jing*, DZ 725), the school was prominent among the Daoist elite in the early Tang and served as a theoretical framework for integrating complex Daoist teachings while laying the foundation for understanding advanced meditation practices (Assandri 2009, 3; Kohn 2007, 181; Yu 2000, 61).

The masters of Twofold Mystery were court Daoists involved in politics and Buddhist debates. Several of them, including the mystical thinker and *Daode jing* commentator Li Rong 李榮 (Kohn 2007, 188–90), wrote commentaries to the *Zhuangzi*, but only the one by Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 has survived as a subcommentary to Guo Xiang’s work (DZ 745). Originally from Shanzhou 陝州 in Henan, Cheng Xuanying lived during the Sui and early Tang dynasties (Lu 1993, 235). He spent his early years as a recluse in Donghai 東海 in the coastal region of Jiangsu (Yu 2000, 44), where he studied with various masters and expanded his Daoist learning. Gaining a reputation as a proficient Daoist scholar, his name reached the capital and, in 631, Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649) invited him to the capital Chang’an, where he remained for twenty years (Yu 2000, 53).

Around 646, Cheng became a resident of the Xihua guan 西華觀 (Temple of Western Florescence), established by Taizong in 631 (Assandri 2009, 38). In 647,

the emperor invited him with other Daoists to take part in the prestigious project of translating the *Daode jing* into Sanskrit, originally entrusted to Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664), then the most famous Buddhist in the capital. Some years later, Cheng Xuanying apparently fell into disgrace: for reasons unknown, during the Yonghui era (650–656), he was exiled or retired to Yuzhou 郁州 near Donghai, the area where he had spent his younger years (Yu 2000, 57).

It seems that he did most of his writing there, including commentaries to the *Zhuangzi*, the *Yijing* (lost), the Numinous Treasure scripture *Duren jing* 度人經 (Scripture of Salvation, DZ 1), and the *Daode jing* (Assandri 2009, 39). The latter, the *Kaiti xujue yishu* 開題序訣義疏 (Supplementary Commentary and Topical Introduction to the Scripture of the Dao and Its Virtue), has survived in Dunhuang (P. 2535) (ed. Yan 1983; see Robinet 1977).

Cheng Xuanying, like other Twofold Mystery thinkers, worked easily with both Daoist and Buddhist teachings, but relied most strongly on the two-truths theory as adapted from the Buddhist Mādhyamika (Middle Way) school (Assandri 2009, 27). An advanced philosophical expression of the ancient distinction of substance and function, it expands on Guo Xiang's traces and that which brings them forth. It is most clearly formulated by Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) in his *Er di zhang* 二諦章 (On the Two Levels of Truth) and *San lun xuanyi* 三論玄義 (Mysterious Meaning of the Three Treatises) (Yu 2000, 88–89).

The theory describes a basic dichotomy of two levels of truth: worldly and absolute, being and nonbeing, projections and mind. As Cheng says in his *Daode jing* commentary:

The two minds of being and nonbeing, the two visions of outcome and subtlety all spring from the one Dao. They arise together, but have different names, but despite their different names they belong to the one Dao. This is called deep and profound.

The mysterious nature of depth and profundity is realized in the return of principle to no obstruction. Neither obstructed by being nor obstructed by nonbeing—this is what we mean by mysterious. (ch. 1; Yan 1983, 303; Robinet 1977, 108; Kohn 2007, 182)

The mysterious state is realized in three stages. First one moves from seeing reality or being as existent to understanding that it is ultimately emptiness or nonbeing. Then one sees that nonbeing, too, is a way of conceptualizing the world and moves into the realm of non-obstruction and non-duality by affirming both being and nonbeing as states of mind. Third, one realizes, in the words of Jizang, that “both duality and nonduality are worldly truth, whereas neither duality nor nonduality is the highest truth. ... This is the Middle Way without duality” (Chan 1963, 360; Ng 1993, 25–26).

The structure of the two levels of truth as applied to the three stages leads logically to the analytical method of the “Four Propositions,” technically known as the *tetralemma* (*siju* 四句), the hallmark of Mādhyamika and of Twofold Mystery. They are: “affirmation of being; affirmation of nonbeing; affirmation of both, being and nonbeing; negation of both, being and nonbeing” (Robinet 1977, 117; Assandri 2009, 1).

Twofold Mystery simplifies this to a certain degree and sees the attainment of Dao as occurring in two steps, described as twofold oblivion (*jianwang* 兼忘).

Practitioners must first discard all concepts of being, then proceed to discard all ideas of nonbeing. These two are, moreover, identified as mental projections (*jing* 境) and active wisdom (*zhi* 智) or mind as such (*xin* 心). Mental projections are imaginary constructs of the mind that have little foundation in actual life but are projected outward to create an apparent reality of something then described as “being.” Wisdom is an inherent function of active consciousness more closely related to the ultimate essence of things and here described in terms of “nonbeing” (Robinet 1977, 245). Becoming oblivious of both means the reorganization of ordinary consciousness to absolute consciousness and again from absolute consciousness to no consciousness: an indeterminate, radiant state that embodies the Dao of Middle Oneness. Cheng describes this in terms of wisdom and insight (*zhahui* 智慧), “two transcendental characteristics of Dao, ... bright and white, with no prior existence nor prior cause and reason, they come only in the course of being used” and lead to great self-benefit (Yu 2000, 111). As Cheng says,

In self-cultivation one discards movement and returns to serenity. Once the practice of the self is complete, one rises again from serenity to movement. Thus going along with all living creatures, one moves without distorting serenity. For this reason there is no harm or evil done. Within and without, one continues to practice. In fruitful interchange, one returns to oneself. (ch. 60; Yan 1983, 560; also Yu 2000, 87, 103)

Translating the *Zhuangzi* into the language and concepts of his time, Cheng Xuanying uses its terms, phrases, images, and stories to explicate his vision of the Daoist path and ultimate attainment. He greatly enhanced the text’s reception and made a major contribution to its appreciation from the early Tang onward (Yu 2000, 164). Especially his highlighting of the various practice methods described in the *Zhuangzi* set the stage for its role in medieval Daoist cultivation.

## 5 Mind-Fasting

This role of the text focuses largely on key methods of self-cultivation. One of them is mind-fasting (*xinzhai* 心齋). The classical passage in the *Zhuangzi* describes it:

Unify your will and don’t listen with your ears but listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your *qi*. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with matching [perception], but *qi* is empty and waits on all things. Dao gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is mind-fasting. (ch. 4; Watson 1968, 57)<sup>3</sup>

Mind-fasting involves the systematical release of sensory processing until, instead of hearing with the ears and the mind, one is only aware of the steady flow of *qi* manifesting as sounds in a state of immobile, empty, open, nonjudging awareness.<sup>4</sup> To reach the inner emptiness of Dao, one begins with an act of will and intention,

<sup>3</sup>The passage is discussed in Billeter 2008, 80; 2010, 96; Graham 1981, 68; Kohn 2011, 107, 2014, 125; Mair 1994, 32; Robinet 1983, 91.

<sup>4</sup>Billeter 2010, 98–99; Graziani 2009, 440, 448; Jochim 1998, 52; Santee 2011, 52–53.

turns one's attention inward, and withdraws the senses. Then one relaxes into a more fluid state, letting the senses go, and allowing pure cosmic energy to move, impartial and open, eventually reaching emptiness and no-mind.<sup>5</sup>

In religious Daoism, mind-fasting was linked with the ritual tradition that adopted the term *zhai* 齋, "fasting," for its own purposes. Originally the preparatory purification before rituals, it came with sensory withdrawal, sexual abstention, physical cleansing, and the avoidance of defilement. In the fifth century, under the growing influence of Buddhism, this "fasting" was connected to the idea of *pūjā* (*gongyang* 供養), i.e., the offering of food to deities and the sharing of food—usually vegetarian meals donated by wealthy sponsors—among humans and gods, lay donors and recluses (Kohn 2010b, 101). The term *zhai* as a result no longer meant "fast" but came to indicate "vegetarian feast," either offered to the gods or shared among the religious community.

Its meaning expanded further with the increased formalization of the ritual schedule. For one, it also came to mean "temporary renunciation," certain specific days, known as *zhaijie* 齋戒, when lay followers would opt to take eight precepts instead of the customary five and participate in the monastic routine (Soymié 1977). The most powerful and expansive use of *zhai*, finally, is as "rite of purgation" or "festival," a major ritual event usually dedicated to the expiation of sins or the blessing of ancestors and the emperor, held at regular intervals throughout the year (Kohn 2003, 124; see also Yamada 1999; Benn 2000).

Zhuangzi's mind-fasting became one of these purgations. It is first mentioned as such in the *Dongxuan lingbao Wugan wen* 洞玄靈寶五感文 (The Five Commemorations of the Cavern Mystery of Numinous Treasure, DZ 1278), a ritual compilation by Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406–477) (Saso 2010, 137). Lu was a leader in both the Celestial Masters and Numinous Treasure schools, best known for his compilation of the first Daoist catalog and his attempts at reforming the Celestial Masters (Bokenkamp in Pregadio 2008, 717–19). The *Wugan wen*, dated to 453, contains a sermon by Lu on the sentiments of gratitude—toward parents, deities, and masters—one should develop to successfully participate in a purgation that clears sins (Schipper in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 253; Yamada in Pregadio 2008, 1001). After the sermon, the text provides a list of purgations, beginning with those of Highest Clarity which involve mind-fasting, i.e., internal cultivation, as opposed to the Numinous Treasure liturgy of purgations undertaken in ritual performance. The text specifically mentions "abandoning the multitude and separating from one's opposite" (*juequn li'ou* 絕群離偶), resting in "serenity and emptiness" (*jixu* 寂虛), "calming the vital energy" (*jingqi* 靜氣), "letting go of the physical form" (*yixing* 遺形), "forgetting the boundless body" (*wangti* 忘體), and "merging with Dao in nonbeing" (*wu yudao he* 無與道合) (2a). It thus echoes various phrases from the *Zhuangzi* closely associated with meditation practice.

A more extensive list of purgations with a similar division appears in the late Tang work *Jinlu dazhai qimeng yi* 金錄大齋啟盟儀 (Address to the Sworn regarding the Great Golden Register Purgation, DZ 485). Part of the extensive Golden

<sup>5</sup> Hara 1993, 96; Kohn 2010a, 25; Santee 2008, 114–15; Yang 2003, 91.

Register Purgation, “the most powerful Daoist rite in medieval times, capable of tempering yin and yang to prevent natural calamities and to protect or save the emperor” (Benn 2000, 320; Maruyama in Pregadio 2008, 580), this work contains a formal sermon to the participants, given by the Master of High Merit (*gaogong* 高功) at the beginning of the service (Schipper in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 998–99). It says,

The only way to attain perfect Dao is with methods of *zhai*, which comes in internal and external form. ... Internal fasting means become peaceful and tranquil, serene and silent to join Dao in soaring and roaming. It is just like the method of mind-fasting Confucius explained to Yan Hui in the old days. (2a)

The *Zhuangzi* practice thus continued in the Daoist ritual tradition as a mainstay of internal purification.

## 5.1 *Sitting in Oblivion*

Another major form of self-cultivation in the *Zhuangzi* is a meditation practice called “sitting in oblivion” (*zuowang* 坐忘). The classical passage describes how the Confucian disciple Yan Hui 顏回 gradually eliminates social demands, such as benevolence and righteousness, rites and music, then finds complete oblivion (Chen 2012, 59). Explaining the latter, he says,

I let my limbs and physical structure fall away, do away with perception and intellect, separate myself from body-form and let go of all knowledge, thus merging in great pervasion. (ch. 6; Kohn 2011, 111; Billeter 2010, 60–61, 80–81; Robinet 1983b, 92; Yang 2003, 90)

“A state of deep meditative absorption and inherent oneness, during which all sensory and conscious faculties are overcome and which is the base point for attaining Dao” (Kohn 2010a, 1), this results in the ability to “take the position of a detached observer,” allowing the anterior cortex of the brain to inhibit strong emotional responses while nourishing the ability to think and plan—even in split-seconds—under great pressure (Davidson et al. 2007, 51). Letting go of all external concerns, it means creating a powerful focus on an inner center, like a key spiritual figure or high value—something like Heaven or life in the *Zhuangzi* (Ford and Wortman 2013, 25). This, in turn, leads to optimal brain functioning, when one makes strong use of all capabilities, unhindered by fear, emotional reactions, and primal thinking. It is the root of peak performance, when body, skills, emotions, and thinking all work together as cooperative partners. All seems to flow intuitively and effortlessly—what *Zhuangzi* calls free and easy wandering, the state that makes the amazing feats of the skilled craftsmen possible (Kohn 2015b, 176).

In medieval Daoism, this state becomes the foundation of the ascent to immortality while the actual practice integrates aspects of Buddhist mindfulness (Kohn 1989). The key document here is the *Zuowang lun* 坐忘論 (On Sitting in Oblivion; DZ 1036; trl. Kohn 2010a), by Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735), renowned court Daoist and the twelfth patriarch of Highest Clarity (Engelhardt 1987, 35–61).



The text presents progress toward oneness with Dao in seven steps and makes use of the *Zhuangzi* in each. It begins with “Respect and Faith,” insisting—in terms cited from the *Zhuangzi* (Kohn 2010a, 141)—that adepts have to have heard of the practice, believe that its promises are real, and trust that they have the capacity and energy to attain them. Next, they work on “Interception of Karma,” which in essence means detaching themselves from society and, at least for a practice period, withdraw from ordinary life and let go of their “mechanical minds” (*Zhuangzi* 12) which are only concerned with temporary profits (2010a, 141). Third, they dedicate themselves to “Taming the Mind,” which means the establishment of basic concentration with the help of breath observation combined with an increased awareness of just how jumpy and fickle the ordinary mind is while appreciating that “spirit is without bend” (*Zhuangzi* 17; 2010a, 142). Next, “Detachment from Affairs,” the half-way point, sees the first conscious turning away from things, an initial level of oblivion, where one lets go of worldly achievements. Here Sima cites the *Zhuangzi* and comments:

The *Zhuangzi* says: “He who has mastered the essentials of destiny does not labor over what it cannot do” [ch. 19]. By “what destiny cannot do” we mean the things outside one’s allotment. Vegetarian food and old clothes are good enough to nourish inner nature and original destiny. Why depend on wine and meat, gauze and silk, and only with them consider life complete? Therefore, whatever is not fundamentally necessary to sustain life has to be given up, and whatever of the necessary things is too many has to be abandoned. (Kohn 2010a, 148)

Step five, “Perfect Observation,” leads practitioners to a reorientation within self and world, to letting go of attachments to body and self, and increasingly overcoming dualistic evaluations and value judgments. This comes with a new appreciation of the workings of destiny, here expanded to include the Buddhist notion of karma. Citing the *Zhuangzi* (ch. 23), but reading it in contemporaneous fashion, the text says: “Karma enters and cannot be avoided: it is your own karma.” The word read here as “karma” is *ye* 業, originally meaning “tasks,” “business,” “outside concerns” (Watson 1966, 255), or “training.” Thus, if poverty and diseases come, they cannot be stopped, but “must be my own karma, my own heaven-given destiny” (ch. 6; Kohn 2010a, 151).

Next one reaches “Stability of Cosmic Peace,” another phrase taken from the *Zhuangzi*: “He whose inner being rests in the stability of cosmic peace [*taiding* 泰定] will spread a heavenly radiance” (ch. 23). This refers to the attainment of clarity and stillness, from where spiritual wisdom arises like a radiant light. The *Zuowang lun* also cites the *Zhuangzi* on the relationship of knowledge and speech. “To know Dao is easy—to keep from speaking about it is hard. To know and not to speak, this gets you to the heavenly part” (ch. 32). It further uses the text to describe the interaction of tranquility and wisdom in the advanced practitioner. “Wisdom and tranquility take turns nourishing each other, and harmony and universal order emerge from inner nature” (ch. 16; Kohn 2010a, 154–55).

In the last step, called “Attaining Dao,” adepts reach full oneness with heaven and earth, a life as long as the universe, and various spiritual powers (*Zhuangzi* 6; 17). As perfected beings they can live among fellow men and spread the purity of



the Dao by just being themselves; or they can ascend spiritually to the heavens where they take up residence among the immortals (Kohn 2010a, 157).

In sum, the *Zuowang lun* not only uses the ancient *Zhuangzi* method as its center but also makes ample use of the text's terminology and outlook, combining its vision and phrases with those of Buddhist insight meditation and connecting them with the ultimate religious Daoist attainment of immortality, i. e., the overcoming of bodily death and expansion of spirit into the vastness of the otherworld and a continued existence among the ranks of the heavenly perfected.

## 6 Body Cultivation

Beyond meditative practices, the *Zhuangzi* also mentions more physical techniques, including breathing and healing exercises. It explicitly states that “the perfected breathes all the way to the heels while the multitude breathe just to the throat—bent over and submissive, they croak out words as if they were retching; full of intense passions and desires, they have only the thinnest connection to heaven” (ch. 6).<sup>6</sup> It also says:

To huff and puff, exhale and inhale, blow out the old and draw in the new, do the Bear Amble and the Bird Stretch, interested only in long life—such are the tastes of the practitioners of healing exercises [*daoyin* 導引], the nurturers of the body, Pengzu's ripe-old-agers. (ch. 15; Graham 1986, 265; Kohn 2008, 14)

Although denigrating in tone, this mentions some key practices of nurturing life that were later integrated into the religion and still form an important part of Daoist cultivation and qigong today. “Huff and puff” translates *chuixu* 吹呴, which are two kinds of exhalation still used as part of the so-called Six Healing Breaths (*liuzi jue* 六字訣), where they describe a hot and a cold breath, done with open and closed mouth, respectively. “Exhale and inhale” is *huxi* 呼吸, a binome that begins with exhalation because that is considered the yang part of the process, the movement of the breath being up and outward. The word *hu*, moreover, is another one of the Six Healing Breaths, where it indicates a blowing form of exhalation, performed with rounded lips (Despeux 2006, 38).

Next, the *Zhuangzi* speaks of “blowing out the old and drawing in the new” (*tugu naxin* 吐故納新). The word *tu*, “to blow out” or “to spit,” implies that the breath was exhaled through the mouth, while *na*, “to draw in,” is written with the “silk” radical and suggests a subtle drawing in through the nose (Despeux 2006, 38). Again, it is still used today to indicate the cleansing of the body's energy through focused breathing, expanded over the centuries into a series of systematic practices (Kohn 2012, 231).

<sup>6</sup>The passage is translated and discussed in Watson 1968, 77–78; Graziani 2006, 299; Kohn 2011, 139; Robinet 1983, 83.

The two physical practices mentioned next, the Bear Amble and the Bird Stretch are documented variously in early Han manuscripts. The *Yinshu* 引書 (Stretch Book) from Zhangjiashan 張家山, dated to 186 BCE, describes their effects: “Bird Stretch is good for the shoulder joints; Bear Amble is good for the lower back” (Kohn 2008, 59, 2012, 29). The *Daoyin tu* 導引圖 (Exercise Chart), unearthed from Mawangdui and dated to 168 BCE, provides an illustration (Nos. 41, 32) (Kohn 2008, 38–39; Harper 1998, 325; Fig. 22.2).

Both bear and bird, moreover, are prominent in the so-called Five Animals’ Frolic (*wuqin xi* 五禽戲) a system of exercises that imitates the movement of animals and goes back to the second-century physician Hua Tuo 華佗. Its first full description appears in the *Yangxing yanming lu* 養性延命錄 (Record on Nourishing Inner Nature and Extending Life, DZ 838), a comprehensive outline of Daoist longevity practices associated with the seventh-century physician and alchemist Sun Simiao. After that, the Five Animals’ Frolic is described in detail in Ming and Qing

**Fig. 22.2** The Bear Amble. (Source: *Daoyin tu*)



sources. It was revived and expanded as part of the qigong movement in the 1970s and is highly popular today (Kohn 2008, 163–67; Wang and Barrett 2006).

The *Yangxing yanming lu*, moreover, cites the *Zhuangzi* variously, especially in its first section on “General Concepts.” First it has its phrase, “Life has a limit” (ch. 3), adding Xiang Xiu’s comment: “All that life is endowed with has a limit, but wisdom has none” (1.1a; Kohn 2012, 166). Next it refers to the *Zhuangzi* passage: “The perfected of old slept without dreaming” (ch. 6), and adds a comment by a certain Zhenzi: “People who are not bothered by affairs during the day do not dream at night. Thus, Master Zhang lived for over a 100 years, remaining erect and strong throughout” (1.9a; Kohn 2012, 174). The general understanding here is that the *Zhuangzi*, along with various Daoist and medical classics, has some fundamental perspectives to contribute to the practice of self-cultivation.

More specific references to the *Zhuangzi* in terms of physical practices appear in later medieval sources, typically using the text as a backdrop for practices that have essentially nothing to do with it. Thus, for example, the ninth-century *Zhiyan zong* 至言總 (Collection of Perfect Words, DZ 1033) refers to the phrase, “The sage values vital essence” (*Zhuangzi* 15), in the context of controlling sexual energies and engaging in the bedchamber arts (4.7a). Similarly, the *Daoshu* 道樞 (Pivot of the Dao, DZ 1017), a collection of self-cultivation and internal alchemy by Zeng Zao 曾造 (d.1151), uses a *Zhuangzi* citation on the purity of water (ch. 15) in the context of describing the oceans and passageways of *qi* in the Daoist body (7.14b; Robinet 1983, 81).

The *Zhuang Zhou Qijue jie* 莊周氣訣解 (Explanation of Zhuang Zhou’s Formulas for [Working with] *Qi*, DZ 823; trl. Huang and Wurmbrand 1987, 2:195–200) even has Zhuang Zhou in the title. A short manual on breath absorption, it cites a commentary to the *Huangdi Yinfu jing* 黃帝陰符經 (Yellow Emperor’s Scripture of the Hidden Talisman; DZ 110; trl. Komjathy 2008) ascribed to Li Quan 李筌 (fl. 713–741) that may date from the Tang (Lévi in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 370). However, the *Yinfu jing* commentary is probably not by Li Quan but rather goes back to Yuan Shuzhen 袁淑真 of the eleventh century and thus dates from the Song (Reiter and Schmidt in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 692), making the *Zhuang Zhou Qijue jie* a Song document. This is also supported by the fact that it echoes the *Qifa yaomiao zhijue* 氣法要妙至訣 (Arcane and Wondrous Formulas on Methods of [Working with] *Qi*, DZ 831; trl. Huang and Wurmbrand 1987, 2:201–20), another Song collection on longevity and breathing.

The text begins with the *Zhuangzi* sentence, “We can point to the wood that has been burned, but the fire is transmitted elsewhere” (ch. 3), then proceeds to interpret it in terms of the relationship of bodymind and destiny/life (*ming* 命). In other words, the same structural pattern holds true for firewood burning to ashes with the fire continuing elsewhere by consuming more fuel *and* the human bodymind exhausting itself while destiny/ life moves on without stopping, in endless transformations of energetic flow. “Time never comes back, destiny/life never stops” (1a), yet by doing the right kinds of exercises we can extend the period of fuel (bodymind) consumption.

The text then moves on to exhort people to not become victims to the desires of the senses, the so-called “five robbers,” and live in moderation (1b–2a). To attain immortality and overcome the bodymind’s tendency to decay, moreover, one must work first of all with the *qi* in the form of breath: “Enclose the *qi* [hold the breath] and swallow it, thereby transforming it into blood. This in turn transforms into vital essence, and vital essence transforms into spirit. Spirit transforms into vital fluids, and vital fluids transform into bones. An immortal embryo forms in the elixir field [in the abdomen], and as such you can live forever” (2ab). The work next provides more detailed instructions on how exactly and for how many times to swallow the *qi*, how to modify one’s diet to desist from the consumption of grain and other solid foods in favor of living on internal *qi* (2b–3b)—a practice commonly known as *bigu* 辟穀 (Kohn 2010b, 150–58). It then moves on to describe ways of enhancing the functioning of the internal organs by visualizing them in particular colors and inhabited by animal-shaped body gods and how to increase energy-circulation through systematic guidance of *qi* through the body (3b–4b).

All these are standard procedures in both the longevity and religious traditions of Daoism (see Kohn 2008). However, they date from the middle ages and cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, historically be linked to the *Zhuangzi*, which just serves as the lead-in classic, the formal link to antiquity, the legitimizing sponsor of a tradition that has developed far beyond it.

## 7 Conclusion

Zhuangzi and the work associated with his name play a key role in the philosophical or literati dimension of Daoism, both in antiquity and in the middle ages, notably in the school of Twofold Mystery. They also had some impact on self-cultivation practices and the longevity tradition within the religion, especially with regard to physical and breathing techniques and more meditative practices of guiding *qi* and calming the mind. Within organized or religious Daoism, both the thinker and the text are most closely associated with immortality, the attainment of mystical oneness with Dao while still alive, followed by an ascension to the gods in an ethereal spirit body and eternal residence in paradises and among the stars (Kohn 2001a, 43).

The extensive description of the perfected (ch. 6) and the spirit person on Mt. Gushe (ch. 1), as well as the many other passages in the *Zhuangzi* that describe the ideal of untrammelled freedom and ease in life, have inspired religious Daoists throughout the ages, encouraging them to follow the meditative methods of mind-fasting and sitting in oblivion. They have also inspired the characterization of immortals as *Zhuangzi*-type perfected, at one with the universal flow and living in a state of deep oblivion. One example is the immortal Chen Tuan 陳搏 (d. 989), whose birthplace in Henan puts him close to Laozi but whose various names (Tunan 圖南, Fuyaozi 扶搖子) relate him to the *Zhuangzi* (ch. 1). Here the huge Peng bird, “pushing off on the whirlwind” (*tuan fuyao* 搏扶搖), rises up 90,000 miles, stretches across the skies and “sets out for the south” (*tunan* 圖南) (Kohn 1990, 10; 2001n,

9). Connecting not only to the image of the mighty bird but also to the entire vision of the *Zhuangzi*, Chen Tuan's names thus suggest a person at one with Dao who uses the inherent power of the universe to ascend to greater heights.

In addition, Daoist hagiographies depict Chen Tuan, as well as many other immortals, as calm and sagely figures whose mind is at peace and who live in detachment from the world. Courted by various emperors, Chen refuses repeatedly to appear at court and is appreciated for his expression of cosmic freedom: "Chen Tuan, recluse of Mount Hua, hides his traces between hills and meadows and lives withdrawn among rocks and caves. Without any restraint he wanders even beyond this world, fully relishing the richness of Dao" (*Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 47.4b).

His close connection to Dao, moreover, finds expression in his ability to recognize people's circumstantial trajectories from their facial features (Kohn 2001b, 37) as well as in his practice of "sleep exercises" (*shuigong* 睡功), a trance-based ecstatic flight to the otherworld (Kohn 2008, 184; Takehiro 1990). The *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* has him describe the ultimate trance state in a poem, using terms quite suggestive of Zhuangzi's free and easy wandering, deep oblivion, and dissolution of identity.

In eternal sleep, the world is breath.  
The soul all gone—no movement in the body.  
Coming back to consciousness—where is there a self?  
I wish my mind to wander once again  
and laugh about the grimy world of dust.  
How can I ever know that I am really there?  
(47.10a; Kohn 2001b, 78–79)

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**Part V**  
**Ethical, Social and Epistemic Issues**

# Chapter 23

## Finding a Way Together: Interpersonal Ethics in the *Zhuangzi*



Chris Fraser

### 1 Introduction

The various threads of discourse preserved in the *Zhuāngzǐ* present a radical challenge to prevailing ways of thinking about ethics, whether in the texts' own day or our own. The dominant stance in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is to reject orthodox moral norms or values on the grounds that they are ineffective guides to *dào* 道 (the way). In their place, Zhuangist writings focus directly on the concepts of *dào* and *dé* 德 (power, agency), along with interrelated conceptions of the well-lived life.

In previous work, I have explored one prominent such conception, by which the fulfilling or admirable life lies in applying our inherent capacity for adaptive, resilient agency to adroitly “wander” or “roam” along the variety of paths presented to us by changing circumstances.<sup>1</sup> This vision of the good life, I suggest, represents a eudaimonistic strand of thought in Zhuangist discourse.

In this essay, I inquire into the attitudes and conduct toward other agents that go hand in hand with the admirable individual life, as depicted in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. How do agents adept in a Zhuangist approach to *dào* handle interpersonal relations? I suggest that on a broadly Zhuangist understanding, interpersonal ethics is simply a special case of competence or adroitness in applying *dé* (power, agency) and following *dào* (ways). The general ideal of exemplary activity is to employ our *dé* to find a fitting, free-flowing *dào* by which to navigate through contingent, changing circumstances. Interpersonal ethics is an application of this ideal to cases in which other agents and our relations with them are prominent features of our

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<sup>1</sup> See Fraser (2011, 2014b).

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circumstances. The ethics of interacting with others is thus not a distinct subject area in Zhuangist discourse but one application of more general views about *dào*, *dé*, and exemplary activity. Instead of wandering the way on our own, interactions with others present us with situations in which we must find our way together.

An important consequence of the Zhuangist approach is that discussions of our conduct toward others are not framed in terms of doing what is morally right or permissible. Instead, judgments as to whether some course of action is morally right or wrong are supplanted by judgments about the quality of our activity as a performance of *dào*—whether it is adept or clumsy, free-flowing or obstructed, in accordance with the situation or at odds with it. This signal feature of Zhuangist ethical discourse makes it challenging to situate it with respect to more familiar ethical views. Although I will suggest the Zhuangist approach overlaps in certain respects with recent moral particularism, I argue that most likely it is distinct from, and amounts to a rejection of, nearly all familiar normative ethical theories, including consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, and contractualism.

If this interpretation is justified, then Zhuangist ethical discourse deserves careful philosophical attention, as it offers a radical alternative to prevailing ways of understanding and evaluating our actions and attitudes toward others—one that, Zhuangist writers would insist, better reflects the human condition and the realities of concrete practice. Moreover, as we will see, a Zhuangist approach may provide deep insights into the sources of normativity.

This study surveys a range of selected *Zhuāngzǐ* passages bearing on interpersonal ethics. The working hypothesis is that these passages are contributions to a broad discourse addressing how agents concerned to live in accordance with *dào* and *dé* might suitably conduct themselves in their relations with others.<sup>2</sup> These passages are representative of Zhuangist discourse insofar as they are a reasonably broad-based selection. I make no claim that they present the coherent, unified standpoint of the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a whole, since the anthology is not organized in such a way as to present such a standpoint. Rather, they constitute an extensive sampling of Zhuangist reflections on ethics, many of which, I argue, share a rough, general orientation and certain interrelated themes. Insofar as these passages do seem to overlap in the themes they take up and attitudes they express, we can usefully refer to them as expressions of one version of a loosely coherent “Zhuangist” ethical stance.

## 2 Morality as an Impediment to the Way

Most discussions of interpersonal ethics in classical Chinese thought examine general norms of conduct for interacting with other persons, along with virtues associated with these norms. The two most prominent terms of evaluation in such

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<sup>2</sup>For the purposes of this discussion, I omit consideration of the so-called “primitivist” writings—books 8–10—and the miscellaneous material in books 28–33, some of which may be from the Han dynasty. I also draw only sparingly on the Huang-Lao and other syncretic writings of books 11–16.

discussions are *rén* 仁 (roughly, benevolence or goodwill) and *yì* 義 (righteousness, duty, or moral norms). These are generally regarded as the highest values, in that evaluation of character or actions as benevolent or righteous is the strongest possible justification for them, defeating any considerations against them, while an action's or trait's violating benevolence or righteousness is conclusive grounds to condemn and avoid it. In both Ruist and Mohist writings, benevolence and righteousness are central to conceptions of the good or proper life and of the exemplary person.

To help highlight the contrast between such mainstream views and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, let me draw a working distinction between “ethics” and “morality.”<sup>3</sup> “Ethics” I will take here to refer to a field of inquiry in which we address general questions about how best to live, both as individual persons and in our relations to others. In the context of early Chinese thought, questions about how to live are typically framed as questions about *dào* (way), such as what *dào* we should follow. “Morality” I will take to refer to a certain kind of answer to these questions, namely that we should live by acting on, and being the kind of person who acts on, norms such as benevolence and righteousness—general norms that trump all others, are universally applicable, and produce actions that are considered right in some general or categorical sense, rather than merely provisionally appropriate for a particular context.

A salient feature of discussions of how to live in *Zhuāngzǐ* is that they are generally not framed in terms of moral concepts, in this sense of “morality.” They do not take benevolence and righteousness to be a helpful or defensible answer to the question of how to live. Nor do they claim that ways of life they present in a positive light are benevolent (*rén*) or righteous (*yì*). Indeed, *Zhuāngzǐ* passages that do mention benevolence and righteousness usually criticize them as a misguided basis for guiding action, an obstacle to finding an appropriate *dào*.

These points can be illustrated by a pair of examples.<sup>4</sup> In a conversation with Yī'érzǐ in book 6, “The Great Ancestral Master” (6/82–89),<sup>5</sup> the Daoist worthy Xǔ Yóu dismisses the proposal that we must dedicate ourselves to benevolence and righteousness while clearly articulating right and wrong. Xǔ compares pursuing benevolence and righteousness to undergoing judicial mutilation: doing so maims our ability to travel along “aimless and wild, unbound and uninhibited, turning and shifting paths.” In Xǔ's view, the *dào* has no determinate direction, destination, or boundaries, and so fixed norms or clear statements of right and wrong only obscure it and impair our ability to find it. To wander along it adeptly, we rely on uncodifiable capacities more like those by which we appreciate beauty.

A second example is a dialogue in which Lǎo Dān rejects Confucius's norms of benevolence and righteousness on the grounds that they are obscure and one-sided,

<sup>3</sup>This distinction is indebted to Williams (1985: 174–175), although I am drawing it differently from how he does.

<sup>4</sup>For an extended treatment of these themes, see Fraser (2021b).

<sup>5</sup>Citations to the *Zhuāngzǐ* give chapter and line numbers in Zhuangzi (1956). All translations are my own.

generate misdirected effort and needless commotion, and only disrupt people's regular, natural patterns of activity (13/45–53). Rather than striving to conform to benevolence and righteousness, we need only “proceed by applying *dé* and move by following *dào*”—that is, employ our inherent capacity for adaptive agency to find ways to proceed in accordance with concrete circumstances.

As these passages indicate, views on interpersonal conduct in the *Zhuāngzǐ* are generally not expressed in terms of what is benevolent, righteous, or other orthodox moral notions. Indeed, as the second example implies, Zhuangist evaluations of conduct or character are unlikely to be recognizably moral, in the typical use of the word.<sup>6</sup> Instead, they are framed in terms of what the texts consider competent *dào*-following or expressions of our nature-given *dé* (power, agency).<sup>7</sup> The point is not that Zhuangist writings offer an unusual or unconventional account of morality. It is that they wholly reject the assumption that questions about what *dào* to follow or how to live are appropriately answered by employing moral notions such as benevolence, righteous, or right and wrong. Morality is not a fitting *dào* and indeed is an impediment to finding the most suitable *dào*.

### 3 Zhuangist Discourse on Interacting with Others

How, then, are we to interact with others? This section surveys a selection of *Zhuāngzǐ* writings that discuss or depict preferred ways of dealing with others.

#### 3.1 General Formulations

Some *Zhuāngzǐ* passages present general statements bearing directly on our conduct with others. In one passage, for example, Lǎo Dān explains to Confucius that like everything that issues from the “ultimate *dào*”—the inexhaustible source of the vast, unfathomable process through which all things in nature emerge, flourish, and die away—human relations follow certain patterns (*lǐ* 理), by which we engage with each other according to various statuses or relationships. “The sage encounters these without going against them and passes beyond them without clinging to them. Responding to them with attunement is *dé* (power, agency); responding by matching with them is *dào*” (22/38–39). These remarks reflect several recurring themes in Zhuangist discourse on dealing with others. One is that interpersonal relations are regarded as details within a broad outlook on the human condition—an outlook in which our lives and relations to each other amount to small parts of a vast, complex

<sup>6</sup>Chong makes a similar interpretive point when he suggests that Zhuangist thought is concerned with “personal” integrity, which is not necessarily the same thing as “moral” integrity (2016: 130).

<sup>7</sup>Lee (2014: 2) and Hansen (2014: sect. 4.3) both rightly stress that the central Zhuangist normative concept is *dào*, rather than paradigmatic moral notions such as benevolence or righteousness.

cycle of generation, development, and decay. Another is that interaction with others is something the sage neither struggles with nor dwells on. The sage handles human relations smoothly, neither neglecting nor becoming preoccupied with them. A third is that the pertinent normative concepts are not specifically moral, but *dào* and *dé*, concepts referring generally to our course of conduct and how we apply our powers of agency. *Dé* lies in responding to patterns by attuning or modulating oneself; *dào* lies in matching up with the patterns rather than clashing with them.

The “Autumn Waters” dialogue explicitly addresses the issue of what conduct to undertake or avoid, expounding on what it calls “the method of the great norm,” which is also depicted as grounded in the patterns (*li*) of things (17/41–47). The text holds that the practical conditions we encounter are constantly changing, such that value distinctions frequently alternate or reverse in different contexts. Adept performance of *dào* thus requires flexible, adaptive responses. “Don’t restrict your intent, or you obstruct *dào*...don’t proceed by a single [standard], or you’ll be at variance with *dào*.” We are to “embrace the myriad things” and proceed without limits, boundaries, biases, favoritism, or any fixed direction. Rather than undertake one course of action or another, we are to accord with how things “transform of themselves.”

### 3.2 *Anecdotes and Examples*

A wide range of *Zhuāngzǐ* passages offer anecdotes and examples that illustrate Zhuangist views on relations and interactions with others.

**Pluralism** A baseline assumption presented in a number of passages is that a *de facto* plurality of ways of life are pursued by different agents according to their different abilities and needs. The very first passage of the anthology—the story of the giant Peng bird who is mocked by the small-minded cicada and dove—implies that those who smugly draw on their personal norms to criticize others are ignorant and narrow-minded, since different ways may be appropriate for different agents (1/8–10). A passage in “Discourse on Evening Things Out” questions whether we can identify anything that all agents agree is right, since creatures of different species—stand-ins for agents with different capacities, values, and lifestyles—appropriately follow different norms in their choice of dwelling, diet, and mate (2/64–73). An implication of such passages is that different ways of life may be appropriate for different agents, in different circumstances, and accordingly we lack justification for imposing a single set of values and norms on all.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Hansen (1992), Wong (2003: 409), and Chong (2016: 132) all call attention to the pluralist nature of Zhuangist ethical discourse. Huang (2010b) aptly emphasizes the importance in Zhuangist ethics of respecting differences. Fraser (2009) discusses Zhuangist grounds for acknowledging the value of other ways of life besides our own.



**Avoiding Arrogance** Several passages present disapproving portrayals of arrogance and prejudice arising from hasty, orthodox judgments that neglect particular agents' actual circumstances. One implication is that, just as different ways of life may have equal status in being suitable for different agents, in different contexts, different agents too have equal status in all being parts of the totality of natural creatures. In one anecdote, a carpenter dismisses a giant tree as worthless, remarking that it has grown so large only because its timber is useless. Appearing to him in a dream, the tree rejoins that the very features the carpenter arrogantly deems useless by his values are to the tree deeply useful—they have allowed it to escape being cut down, as timber trees are. Moreover, the tree adds, the carpenter and the tree share the same status as two things among the myriad in nature. One thing can have no grounds for dismissing the value of another simply because it is different (4/64–75).

In another anecdote, Zíchán, a high official, contemptuously demands that Shěntú Jiā, an ex-convict judicial amputee, defer to his superior rank by remaining behind when he exits their teacher's home (5/13–24). Shěntú responds that within their teacher's gate, such conventional status differences are irrelevant; the concern is with one's inward state, not outward form. The implication is that the Zhuangist adept does not discriminate against others on the basis of irrelevant details of their social status, outward appearance, or personal history.

**Inevitable Relations** Circumstances may impose unavoidable expectations and responsibilities on us, which we have no choice but to deal with. This point is illustrated by a conversation in which Confucius offers advice to Zīgāo, a diplomat overwhelmed with stress over a high-stakes mission (4/34–53). The world presents us with certain “inevitable” requirements, Confucius remarks. Having been born into a particular family, we have elderly parents that we must care for. Residing in a particular territory, we are inescapably subject to political obligations. Our life circumstances entail that we cannot simply live as we please; relationships with others place us in situations that force us to respond to their needs and expectations. We can do so adeptly (by helping our parents flourish in their old age, for example, or by building stable diplomatic relations between our state and a rival) or clumsily (by abandoning our parents to starve or antagonizing both our ruler and the rival state). Either way, the path forward—the *dào*—as we encounter it in such situations presents us with no choice but to deal with our circumstances. The height of *dé*, according to the text, is to respond to unavoidable social pressures with equanimity.

**Ideal Relations** Several passages depict ideal relations between agents as a matter of “forgetting” (*wàng* 忘) each other. A prominent example is a group of friends who share a Zhuangist approach to life, with “nothing contrary in their hearts,” who describe their preferred relationship as “living by forgetting each other” (6/62).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See too the three passages that metaphorically compare ideal social life to fish who “forget each other in rivers and lakes” (6/23, 6/73, 14/60).

“Forgetting” in Zhuangist discourse typically refers to freedom from disruptive, anxious attention to extraneous matters, as when we “forget about” well-fitting clothing or an athlete performs well by forgetting about the prizes and focusing on her performance.<sup>10</sup> The implication is that in ideal relations, the two sides interact immediately, smoothly, and harmoniously, without fretting about how to conduct themselves toward one another. They are so deftly responsive to each other that their interactions require no deliberate undertaking or anxious attention, as when fish swim together as a school or dance partners spontaneously feel and respond to each other’s movements.

**Avoiding Harm** Several passages indicate that the adept agent avoids harm to others. “The sage deals with things without injuring them. One who does not injure things, things in turn cannot injure. Only one who injures nothing is able to welcome and send off others” (22/80–81). Other passages suggest that, given the opportunity to influence the conduct of powerful figures, agents should seek to limit harm if they can, as when Yán Huí seeks to improve the conduct of a cruel ruler (4/1–3) or Yán Hé attempts to tutor a vicious crown prince (4/54–56).

A crucial aspect of avoiding harm is understanding the constitution and needs of those with whom we interact, which may reflect the plurality of ways of life appropriate for different agents. In the parable of Hùndùn—a moniker referring to primal, unformed chaos—Hùndùn’s grateful guests, the rulers of the north and south oceans, seek to repay his kindness by boring seven holes in his head to make him resemble others in having openings through which to see, hear, eat, and smell. The result is that on the seventh day, Hùndùn perishes (7/33–35). Had his friends better understood him, they would have left him alone, since his nature was to be formless, without openings.

An especially salient implication of the Hùndùn story is that, contrary to the Golden Rule, the appropriate way to interact with others may not be to take our own preferences or needs as a model for how to treat them.<sup>11</sup> Hùndùn’s guests assume they are doing him a kindness by modifying his features to be like their own and everyone else’s, but they are mistaken: what suits them does not suit him. By acting with good intentions yet failing to respond to his actual constitution, they inadvertently harm him.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I explore the implications of “forgetting” in Fraser (2014a) and (2019). As Kohn suggests, “forgetting” is akin to the attitude expressed in English as “never mind” (2015: 180).

<sup>11</sup> Huang Yong has insightfully emphasized this point in several publications. See Huang (2010a, b, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Chong puts the point well: “We should not impose what we think constitutes ‘the good life’ onto others, no matter how well-intended” (2016: 132). As Wong remarks, on the Zhuangist approach, “there is a grain, then, unique to each human being to which one must become attuned to deal with him or her” (2008: sect. 4.2).

This point is illustrated vividly in the story of the seabird that unexpectedly landed near the capital of the inland state of Lǔ.<sup>13</sup> Delighted by the bird's appearance—an auspicious omen—the Lord of Lǔ honored it with a ritual feast and musical performance, but the bird only looked confused and upset, refused to eat or drink, and soon died. Despite his intention to honor the bird, the lord only harmed it, because he “nurtured a bird with what nurtures oneself” (18/35). The appropriate approach would have instead been to “nurture a bird with what nurtures birds,” leaving the avian visitor to fly about as it pleased, perch in the forest, float on lakes, and eat whatever it wished (18/35). Our treatment of others must fit their needs; we cannot simply assume that what suits us will suit them. The story observes that since different creatures enjoy different things, have different preferences, and thrive in different circumstances, “the former sages did not regard their abilities as identical or their affairs as the same. Names stop at reality; what's right is determined by what fits. This is called attaining the patterns (*tiáo* 條) and preserving welfare” (18/39). The failure to accommodate the bird properly is a special case of the more general advice that to conform to the patterns of things and preserve well-being, we must recognize that different agents may have diverse abilities and require varied treatment. We should set aside predetermined labels and titles (*míng* 名) associated with standard norms of conduct (*yì* 義), and instead attend to the reality of the situation (*shí* 實) and what suits or fits it (*shì* 適), adapting our actions to the facts (such as a bird's normal diet), rather than blindly following codified norms (such as the standard menu for a ritual feast honoring a guest). The crux is that when interacting with others, we should seek to “attain the patterns,” responding to the facts by tailoring our actions to the situation.<sup>14</sup>

“*Proceeding on both sides.*” Other passages suggest the most fitting course of action may sometimes be to find compromises between our path and others'. A pivotal *Zhuāngzǐ* passage addressing interpersonal relations is the story of the monkey keeper, a deceptively simple example in book 2, “Discourse on Evening Things Out,” that draws on a rich background theory about the nature of value. The monkey keeper announced that his charges would receive three nuts in the morning and four in the evening. Preferring a larger breakfast, the monkeys were angry. So the keeper reversed the allocation: everyone would instead receive four in the morning and three in the evening. The monkeys were delighted. The keeper harmonized (*hé* 和) things by rearranging the allocation in a way that defused the monkeys' anger at no loss to himself. The text calls this adaptive response to others' attitudes “proceeding

<sup>13</sup> There are two versions of the story, 18/29–39 and 19/64–76. The discussion focuses on the first, longer version.

<sup>14</sup> For this reason, I am not persuaded by Huang's interpretation of the story as exemplifying “patient relativism,” the view that the proper standards for assessing actions as right or wrong are the values of the recipient of the action (Huang 2010a, b, 2018). I suggest the story is better explained as illustrating the broader theme of guiding action by fitting the patterns of particular situations. These patterns include facts about both the patient of the action and the agent. A crucial aspect of the seabird story is that by treating the bird inappropriately, the Lord of Lǔ also failed to achieve his own end of celebrating the auspicious visitor.

on both sides” or “walking two ways” (*liǎng xíng* 兩行) (2/40). The implication is that an adroit way to interact with others is to allow both sides to proceed jointly along a path that suits them. The two sides need not agree about the best or the right path. They need not hold that the shared path they settle on is universally justified, nor even justified in any context beyond their immediate circumstances. They need only find a way to go on that is acceptable to both sides and allows them to proceed harmoniously.

The monkey story appears in the context of an elaborate discussion of the relation between *dào* and judgments of what is *shì* 是 or *fēi* 非—right or wrong, “this” or not—which provides a theoretical basis for its approach to dealing with others. To better understand the import of the story, it is worth briefly sketching some of this background.<sup>15</sup> The story is introduced to illustrate the foolishness of laboriously insisting that all things form a unity while failing to recognize that *dào* is originally an unformed, indefinite field of ways by which anything can be divided off from other things and deemed “so” or not. Given this understanding of *dào*, according to the text, once we set such deeming practices aside, all manner of things “reconnect as one,” forming an undivided, indeterminate totality (2/33–36). “To labor your wits deeming things a unity” is like insisting on three nuts in the morning, rather than seeing that the underlying totality—seven nuts—can be divided up in numerous ways while remaining “the same” in adding up to seven (2/38).

According to the discussion immediately preceding the monkey story, action-guiding distinctions between “this/right” and “not/wrong” or between “so” and “not-so” are determined by the practices we adopt, which “complete” one of a variety of ways of proceeding (2/33). Any practice we undertake produces both “completion” (*chéng* 成) and “deficiency” (*kuī* 虧, *huǐ* 毀)—it brings some values and distinctions into view while neglecting or obscuring others. Apart from our practices, nothing is inherently right or wrong, “so” or “not-so.” Hence if a path we have undertaken runs into difficulty, we are free to modify it. The adept grasp this point and so refrain from “imposing-*shì*” (*wéi shì* 為是), or deeming things this or that on the basis of fixed or rigid judgments applied without regard for particular, variable contexts. Instead, they “accommodate things in the ordinary” (2/36). This opaque phrase the text unpacks by identifying the “ordinary” (*yōng* 庸) with what is useful (*yòng* 用) or successful (*dé* 得) and connects or proceeds in a proficient, free-flowing manner (*tōng* 通) (2/36–37). To successfully accommodate things in some context, the text says, is to apply “according-*shì*” (*yīn shì* 因是)—provisionally, adaptively taking things as this/right (*shì*) or not “in accordance with” (*yīn* 因) particular circumstances (2/37).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Recent discussions with Stephen Walker influenced my interpretation of several points in this section.

<sup>16</sup> I follow Graham (1969/70) in taking *yīn shì* 因是 to be a set phrase because the two graphs occur together in the text four times referring apparently to the same idea. As Graham proposed, the phrase *yīn shì* seems to contrast with *wéi shì* 為是, which also appears four times, referring to insistently imposing some *shì* judgment on things.

Further passages link “according-*shì*” to the view that “this/right” and “that/wrong” are not rigidly opposed, since what is “this” can also be “that” and vice versa (2/29–31). Applying this view, one can attain the “hinge of *dào*”—the key to following *dào* adeptly—by which we can respond to changing circumstances with unlimited flexibility, deeming anything either this/right or not for some purpose or other (2/31). The successful practice of *dào*, according to the text, lies in applying such provisional, “according-*shì*” judgments without knowing one is doing so—without knowing what the appropriate responses will be, since they are discovered in the course of action (2/37).<sup>17</sup>

A key to understanding the monkey story is that the change in nut distribution is presented as an example of “according-*shì*.” The approach to dealing with others depicted thus emerges from a more general account of adroit *dào*-following as an adaptive response to circumstances that facilitates ongoing ordinary practice. The *dào*-adept acts mainly to seek “ordinary coping” (*yōng* 庸), or useful, successful, free-flowing movement along a path presented by the situation, incorporating factors such as one’s social role and relations with others. The adept understands there is no definitive way to distinguish *shì-fěi* and thus there are no definitive norms of conduct or inherently correct value distinctions. However, conflict with others creates obstructions for both sides in proceeding along their ordinary, useful path. Since the adept are attached to no particular scheme of distinctions, they adjust their course of action according to the context to achieve harmony and allow both sides to proceed along their respective *dào*.

## 4 A Way with Others

The diverse writings just surveyed present not a single, specific ethical doctrine but a family of criss-crossing, interrelated attitudes and approaches to dealing with others. Here I want to call attention to certain broad themes that recur across several of them, which I suggest offer a plausible general explanation for the approaches presented in a number of others.

A motif that appears repeatedly is that the wise agent avoids imposing inappropriate standards, norms, or expectations on others when interacting with or making judgments about them. Instead, we are to be responsive to their concrete context, including their current status, their constitution and dispositions, and their norms and practices, which may be diverse, complex, changing, and different from our own.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>At 2/37, I follow Wáng Shúmín in taking 因是已 to be equivalent to 因是也 and Wáng Yīnzhī 王引之 in reading 已而不知其然 as equivalent to 此而不知其然 (Wáng 1988: 64). See too Chén (2007: 72).

<sup>18</sup>Hansen (1992, 2014), Wong (2003, 2008), and Chong (2016) all note these points in various ways.

A helpful way to elucidate this general motif is by noting how it relates to a second theme, that appropriate activity is marked by how well it responds to the dynamic patterns of things. In pre-Han thought generally, “pattern” (*lǐ* 理, *tiáo* 條) refers to facts about how things are structured or organized, how they relate to each other, and how they develop, proceed, or transform. Patterns are understood to be dynamic, reflecting ongoing development, interaction, and transformation. Conforming to the patterns is a prerequisite for proper or successful action; misunderstanding or overlooking the patterns is likely to lead to error or failure. *Dào* as agents encounter it is in effect a field of potential paths of activity shaped by the patterns. Following *dào* well lies in finding and proceeding along a path that aligns with the patterns; following it badly is struggling against or conflicting with the patterns.

This conception of *dào* and patterns I suggest helpfully illuminates many aspects of Zhuangist discussions of our interactions with others. In effect, other agents and their activities are features of the patterns we encounter in various circumstances. Interacting with others harmoniously is one aspect of virtuous *dào*-following, or responding to the patterns adroitly. Roughly this conception seems expressed in Lǎo Dǎn’s description of *dé* 德 (virtue, agency-power) as “attuning” ourselves to the patterns of human relations and *dào* as “matching” with them (22/38–39) and in the “Autumn Waters” description of “knowing *dào*” as “attaining proficiency in the patterns” and thus understanding how to adapt our conduct to changing situations (17/48). According to the seabird story, by adapting our actions to fit the facts of the situation, we “attain the patterns and preserve welfare” (18/39). To tailor one’s path to the context is to accord with the patterns; to harm others or impose irrelevant, ill-fitting standards on them is to clash with the patterns.

I propose, then, that a rough background view informing many of the more specific *Zhuāngzǐ* discussions of interaction with others is that interpersonal relations are to be handled in much the same way as any other field of activity. We seek to proceed deftly and proficiently, responding to the patterns at work in the particular context, navigating our way through them harmoniously, without conflict, obstruction, or disturbance. This vision of appropriate conduct is not presented as a specifically moral ideal but as one aspect of a general conception of virtuous *dào*-following. On this view, the criteria of appropriate action in dealing with others are a cluster of notions set forth in passages such as the seabird and monkey stories. We act well when what we do fits (*shì* 適) the reality (*shí* 實) of the situation, which includes others’ needs and propensities as well our own. We seek to accord with the situation (*yīn* 因), attain competence (*dá* 達) in its patterns (*lǐ* 理, *tiáo* 條), and by doing so achieve harmony (*hé* 和) while preserving welfare. An apt course of action will seem “ordinary” (*yōng* 庸) while being useful (*yòng* 用), successful (*dé* 得), and “free-flowing” or proficient (*tōng* 通). These notions amount largely to a conception of successful performance, bearing connotations of facility, competence, and proficiency.

If these descriptions indeed amount to a rough conception of success or competence, a natural question to ask is: what counts as success here? What makes some course of conduct with others fitting, harmonious, competent, or “free-flowing”?

Just as Zhuangist conceptions of *dào* tend to be pluralistic and contextual, I suggest, conceptions of success or competence in finding and pursuing a *dào* with others are as well.

The core idea is that a successful, “free-flowing” path will be one that accommodates both sides’ ends as they develop during the course of their interaction. Whenever agents interact, each side comes into the situation following some given *dào*, incorporating their respective practices, norms, values, and ends. This prior *dào* is shaped by each agent’s abilities, needs, interests, habits, prior choices, and life circumstances. Normally it will include a commitment to “ordinary” values and ends such as preserving our own and our family’s lives and welfare. Our initial conception of success may be simply to continue following this *dào* smoothly. Like any *dào* we follow in practice, however, our prior *dào* may need to be modified as we proceed through concrete, changing circumstances. Our *dào* may lead to conflict with others, for example—the monkeys may be unhappy with the menu, the bird we intended to nurture may refuse to eat. Such conflict constitutes an obstacle to both sides in continuing on their path, preventing them from “flowing freely.” It indicates a failure to accord with the patterns we encounter, poor fit between our conduct and the context. Hence competent agents will employ *dé* to adjust their path and find a harmonious way for both sides to proceed—both sides, not only their own, because if one side’s path remains blocked, the conflict will only recur (the monkeys expand their protest) or one’s action may fail entirely (the bird dies). Resolving conflicts may involve revising or dropping some prior ends or norms in favor of others—adopting an overall daily quota of nuts instead of a particular distribution at meals, for example, or honoring a bird by placing it in a sanctuary, instead of subjecting it to a boisterous social event.

In both of these examples, the appropriate course lies in switching from one’s initial way of treating others to a different course that suits them better while preserving key aspects of one’s original *dào*—the monkeys still receive seven nuts a day, the Lord of Lǚ still honors the auspicious visitor. *Zhuāngzǐ* writings offer no fixed formula for finding such appropriate courses except to avoid rigidly imposing our way on others, instead adapting how we proceed to their positive or negative responses. Indeed, there could be no such fixed formula, since what counts as “fitting” or “free-flowing” will depend on the context. Moreover, in many cases there is unlikely to be any unique solution to conflict. Perhaps the monkey keeper could have offered four nuts at both meals; perhaps the Lord of Lǚ could have let the bird fly off and simply marked its visit with a commemorative plaque. Accordingly, in many cases, the aim will not be to find the “right” or most fitting *dào*—there may be no such thing—but to find a path that provisionally allows both sides to move on, addressing their values as best we can. The complexity of different agents’ *dào* and circumstances means that any such path must be undertaken provisionally, with humility. Our initial response to conflict might fail to fully address the relevant patterns, leaving grounds for further conflict, or the patterns themselves may change. A judicious agent will remain open to further adjustments in the path by which two sides interact. Perhaps in the end the monkeys should be set free to find their own nuts, for example.



This loose approach to finding a way with others is formal, not substantive, in that it concerns only how to go about handling interaction with other agents rather than stipulating substantive ends or criteria of appropriate conduct. It reflects a deeply modest, skeptical attitude concerning whether we can say much about interpersonal ethics that is general and substantive yet helpful in practice. Accordingly, it avoids systematic ethical theory. Moreover, it is not conceptually distinct from *dào*-following or exercising agency in general and so overlaps with many other ways of assessing conduct. Factors that contribute to a course of action being more or less fitting might conventionally be considered matters of etiquette, tact, prudence, aesthetics, customs, or morality. At the same time, however, the Zhuangist approach might at times violate norms in any of these areas, if doing so seems the most fitting way to “proceed on both sides.”

#### 4.1 *An Ethics of Dào and Dé*

In light of the preceding discussion, I suggest that Zhuangist ethics can informatively be labeled an ethics of *dào* and *dé*. Its central concepts are not right and wrong, nor virtues and vices, but *dào* and *dé*—apt or appropriate paths of conduct and the potency or power of agency by which we follow such paths.<sup>19</sup> The focus and terms of evaluation of a *dào-dé* ethics are distinct from those of ethical theories structured around principles, duties, obligations, rights, or virtues. The focus is on how one proceeds and the path one pursues—the manner of our agency (*dé*) and the course we follow (*dào*). The ideal is an ongoing, resilient, adroit flow of agency responsive to features of our circumstances. Appropriate treatment of other agents emerges from a concern with *dào* and *dé* but is not the primary focus.

This approach to ethics is rooted in and rendered plausible by the Zhuangist understanding of the structure of action and of *dào*. Zhuangist writers tend to conceive of action through the model of skills. Normatively commendable action for them is an adroit response to particular, concrete circumstances akin to the competent performance of an art or a skill. To them, it is plausible, even obvious, that competent conduct rests primarily on an implicit feel for and uncodifiable responsiveness to one’s situation, for it is a truism that skilled performances issue from such tacit abilities. This view of action dovetails with a prominent Zhuangist conception of *dào*. For many early Chinese thinkers, *dào* can be thought of as a set of norms governing the course and manner of our conduct—what we do and how we do it. Mohist and Ruist thinkers sought to identify *dào* with norms that are “constant” or “regular” (*cháng* 常)—that is, settled and consistent. By contrast, Daoist texts typically depict *dào* as continually shifting and transforming, following no fixed or predetermined boundaries, such that there is no “constant” *dào*. The question “What is the *dào*?” thus has no determinate general answer. All we can offer are

<sup>19</sup> Lee helpfully describes the Zhuangist approach as an “ethics of attunement” to *dào* (2014: 10).

vague generalizations, such as “proceed according to the facts of the situation” (4/43) or “rely on natural patterns, slice through the main gaps, and be guided by the major seams, responding to what’s inherently so” (3/6–7).

This Zhuangist approach to ethics may be unique.<sup>20</sup> Clearly it is not a brand of consequentialism, although as we have seen it generally endorses avoiding harm. Nor does it focus on social roles or propriety, as Ruism does, although again, as we have seen, it may treat some roles as unavoidable and some norms of propriety as expedient. Since *dé* (agency) is one of its central concepts and it valorizes exemplary agents such as the sage, it has a prominent virtue-like dimension and, I have argued elsewhere, a eudaimonistic aspect.<sup>21</sup> But *dé* is not normatively basic; it is understood through its relation to *dào*, which is conceptually more fundamental. *Dào* is not a virtue but a path, so an ethics of *dào* and *dé* is not accurately described as a virtue ethics.

Treatment of others is not grounded in respect for their dignity as rational, autonomous agents, as in Kantian ethics, but in acknowledgment of their presence as other creatures who are equally part of nature and whose paths cross our own. It is not driven by care or concern for others, but only by responsiveness to their situation, which in some cases might prompt us to act in their interest. The *dào-dé* approach implies that usually the harmonious or fitting path will be one that both sides can accept, but it does not explicitly appeal to justification to those affected by our actions, nor to a contractualist relation with them.

This approach is deeply contextual, as the fitting or harmonious path will be extensively shaped by particular circumstances. Formally, insofar as the key concepts of *dào*, *dé*, “patterns,” “freely flowing,” “fitting,” and so on are understood roughly consistently across different contexts, it need not be considered a form of relativism. However, the substantive actions associated with these concepts will vary for different agents and in different situations.

This contextualism means that the *dào-dé* approach may converge in some respects with recent moral particularism.<sup>22</sup> Particularism is a family of views according to which moral judgments and statuses are based purely on features of particular cases, without appealing to general moral principles. Particularists argue that morally admirable agency does not lie in applying general principles to cases, that similar features in different cases may have variable relevance in judging what actions to take, and that a plurality of different features may be relevant in one case or another.<sup>23</sup> Such particularist claims overlap in various ways with ideas presented in Zhuangist discussions such as the “Discourse on Evening Things Out” and “Autumn Waters,” which consider how the plurality and heterogeneity of values at stake in diverse, changing contexts make finding a suitable course of action a matter of

<sup>20</sup> Lee insightfully remarks on how the orientation of Zhuangist thought diverges from orthodox conceptions of ethics, leading some interpreters to deny the *Zhuāngzǐ* presents any ethical views and others to foist an alien conception of morality on Zhuangist writings (2014: 3, 17).

<sup>21</sup> See Fraser (2014b).

<sup>22</sup> Lee (2014: 47) also notes the similarities between Zhuangist ethics and particularism.

<sup>23</sup> Dancy (2001), especially sect. 3.

applying situational discretion, not following general norms. However, unlike particularism, these discussions do not offer an analysis or explanation of the nature of moral judgment. Nor do they insist that general standards have no role at all (perhaps they may be applicable in some cases, or perhaps they might function as abstract examples of appropriate action). Moreover, since a Zhuangist ethics of *dào* and *dé* is not an approach to morality, *per se*, it is accordingly not a variety of moral particularism. Its central structural concepts—*dào* and *dé*—are significantly different from those of moral particularism, and the contextual responses of the Zhuangist adept may be grounded in factors quite different from the moral reasons and judgments that concern the particularist. Still, the relations between Zhuangist thought and particularism are intriguing and deserve further exploration.

## 4.2 *Zhuangist Normativity*

In the Zhuangist view as I have sketched it, what is the source of the normative push to treat others well? Why seek harmony or “proceeding on both sides” rather than simply forcing others to do things our way?

The answer, I suggest, lies in interaction between the concepts of *dào* and *dé*, the paths presented to us by our situation and the Zhuangist conception of adept agency and hence the well-lived life. The normativity implicated in interaction with others is a version of that implicated in *dào*-following generally. To perform *dào* well and excel as an agent is to find our way through a field of potential paths freely and smoothly, with harmony and ease, while avoiding hindrance or obstruction. For many *Zhuāngzǐ* passages, the good life lies in attaining virtuosity in *dào*-following, by which we wander or roam about freely, flexibly, and adeptly, taking up various paths that circumstances present without becoming fixated on any particular path.<sup>24</sup> This conception of the good life is one reason for the Zhuangist interest in skills, as skilled performances offer examples of fluid, adaptive responses to changing circumstances.

The underlying source of normativity in interpersonal relations, then, is that we achieve a higher level of excellence in performing *dào* when we act in ways that smoothly and harmoniously respond to the presence of other agents. The *dào* virtuoso avoids mistreating others because doing so is clumsy, awkward, and creates obstructions to *dào*. It is a failure to perform *dào* well and accordingly a defect in one’s *dé*. On this view, the wrongness involved in mistreating others is a special case of doing something badly, in a way that is ineffectual, runs into obstacles, or creates difficulties by overlooking relevant factors. It is comparable to struggling to scale a cliff blocking our path instead of taking an easy detour around it or to forcing our way through a crowd instead of joining a stream of pedestrians to one side who are already moving in the same direction.

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<sup>24</sup> I explore this view of the good life in Fraser (2011, 2014a, b).

To be sure, the normative force implicated by this notion of clumsy or incompetent *dào*-following is weak. Nothing compels us to take the more open or fitting path. Moreover, as we saw in Sect. 4, the appropriate path or paths may be underdetermined by the circumstances. Several more or less feasible paths may be available, the most fitting or free-flowing ones being dependent partly on the dispositions, abilities, and discretion of the agents involved. Still, failing to take a path that accommodates others suitably is a mistake—it gets something wrong—since it involves ignoring relevant features of the circumstances that affect how well things go for everyone.

This approach to evaluating action may reflect deep features of the nature of normativity. On the Zhuangist approach, normativity arises from interaction between the course of our activity and the shape of our situation—the features or pressures it presents.<sup>25</sup> That any normative pressure on us exists at all is a product of our status as agents, situated in some context, engaged in some *dào*. Interaction between our *dào* and our circumstances, including the presence of others, makes some paths better and some worse, in the sense of being more or less likely to go well, by our lights and those of others with whom we interact. The features and relations that fix the varying efficacy of different paths are not determined purely by our activity, nor by the world (including other agents) apart from our activity, but by interaction between the two. Norms of interpersonal conduct ranging from friendship to etiquette to morality reflect patterns of human responses, expectations, needs, and capacities as we encounter them in proceeding along our *dào*. A key Zhuangist claim is that we perform best in following *dào* by attending and responding to these patterns directly, rather than working through the intermediary of codified general guidelines.

## 5 Objections and Replies

One possible objection to a Zhuangist *dào-dé* ethics is that it might allow immoral actions. The *dào-dé* approach seeks smooth, harmonious, efficacious interaction between agents, but without specifying in advance of particular cases what smoothness, harmony, or efficacy might be, beyond the different parties finding a way to jointly proceed along their path. Might this approach be open to abuse? For example, perhaps agents with greater physical or political power might achieve “harmony” with the less powerful by coercing them into submission, or perhaps they might promulgate an exploitative ideology that indoctrinates them into accepting subordinate status. The passage leading into the monkey story indicates that the adept accommodates things in what is “ordinary” and efficacious. But perhaps courses of action considered ordinary, customary, or efficacious might be unfair or

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<sup>25</sup> Hansen has emphasized how the implications of “path” or “course” metaphors shape the Zhuangist understanding of normativity (2014: sect 4.3).

unjust, as when a society's widely accepted customs discriminate against some of its members.

As a first response to this criticism, it is worth pointing out that compelled "harmony" and forced cooperation are not actual harmony or cooperation. Since the basis for conflict remains, problems are likely to reemerge. That Zhuangist ideas can be twisted and misused as the criticism suggests is not a weakness of the *dào-dé* approach specifically, since the values of any ethics can be twisted and misused.

Still, a critic may press the worry that since the Zhuangist approach to resolving interpersonal conflict makes no claim to moral justification and thus to the special objectively or impartially correct status associated with morality, it risks producing morally objectionable outcomes. In that case, even though the *dào-dé* approach itself assigns no privileged role to moral justification, we might nevertheless have strong moral reasons to reject it.

In fact, however, I suggest that the Zhuangist approach can indeed yield a type of impartial justification for at least some courses of action. The concept of "proceeding on both sides" and anecdotes such as the monkeys and the seabird seem to endorse paths of action that all parties involved can jointly undertake, according to their own dispositions and values. The texts themselves do not invoke the concept or terminology of impartial justification. But they suggest that an appropriate course of action is one that is fitting, free-flowing, or successful from the standpoint of each of those involved. This status is tantamount to holding that such action is justifiable, or at least acceptable, to each side, by that side's own evolving values, a relation that constitutes a plausible conception of interpersonal impartiality. Courses of action that fulfill the ideal of "proceeding on both sides" or "attaining the patterns and preserving welfare" thus are unlikely to be morally objectionable.

A second important criticism is that, since it provides no concrete or substantive guidelines for action, the *dào-dé* approach may be empty or impracticable. Of course, to assume a practicable or justifiable approach to ethics must provide substantive guidelines is to beg the question against Zhuangist views. Various *Zhuāngzǐ* writings on *dào* and value contend that values are plural, heterogeneous, and contingent on changing circumstances.<sup>26</sup> Hence no concrete, substantive general guidelines may be available, only loose, formal guidelines, such as "proceed on both sides."

Beyond this point, however, arguably *Zhuāngzǐ* writings do provide a practicable approach to action, one modeled on the performance of skills. This approach involves seeking harmony, good fit, and free-flowing paths by reducing the influence of potentially biased preconceptions, attending to contextual details such as the paths of other agents, and developing our capacity for finding creative, effective responses to particular obstacles or deficiencies. The idea is to proceed much as we do in overcoming challenges in the performance of skills, such as carving up oxen, building wheels, piloting a boat, or catching cicadas for lunch.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Fraser (2009, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> I explore this practical, applied side of Zhuangist thought in Fraser (2014a, 2021a).

A key difference from the skill examples is that skills have inherent ends by which to evaluate performance. The wheelwright's skill is measured by how smoothly the wheels roll, the boat pilot's by how promptly and safely the boat reaches its destination, and so forth. By contrast, much of our interaction with others has no fixed end. So how do we evaluate how well some course of action fits or flows in a particular context? A plausible Zhuangist answer, again, is that the contexts themselves provide the grounds for such evaluations. In any given context, we find ourselves proceeding along some path, holding and responding to certain ends or values, such as our own welfare, that of our family, friends, and community, and various projects we or they may be involved in. We interact with other agents whose paths overlap ours and whose values we must accordingly take into account as well, if we are to proceed along our *dào* in a smooth, free-flowing way. All of these factors jointly provide the initial criteria by which to evaluate how well various courses of action fit the situation, are harmonious or free-flowing, preserve welfare, proceed on both sides, and so forth. In particular contexts, then, we can evaluate the fit or flow of our actions by asking questions such as whether the monkeys are happily cooperating and thriving and whether a ceremonial banquet is an apt way to honor an auspicious bird.

We may find that some of the factors relevant to such evaluations conflict with each other and so must be modified or set aside. Moreover, as we adapt to circumstances and proceed along our way, our situation, values and ends, and relations to others may change. The features by which to measure good fit for courses of action in particular contexts may change with them, and our path of action may need to shift accordingly. The status of flowing or fitting well will always be provisional, the path constantly open to refinement or reorientation in pursuit of better fit with the patterns we encounter. Virtuoso *dào*-following lies as much in how we respond to others and find our way together as in the specific path of conduct we undertake at one time or another.

## 6 Conclusion

The *Zhuāngzǐ* presents an approach to the ethics of interacting with others that grows out of a broader concern with living a life in which we employ our naturally occurring *dé* to find and adeptly proceed along suitable *dào*. On this approach, the question of how to treat others is not fundamentally distinct from questions about how to undertake any course of activity. Interpersonal conduct is approached as a field of skill in which we seek to find a fitting, efficacious course, as shaped by the patterns inherent in our circumstances. Such a course will be one that enables all those involved to proceed along a path that suits them.

The Zhuangist approach is non-moral, insofar as it is concerned not with what is morally right or wrong but with what “flows” or “connects through” (*tōng*), “fits” (*shì*), and yields “harmony” (*hé*) in some situation. Agents’ conduct and character are assessed not in terms of recognizably moral concepts but in terms more similar

to how we assess the performance of skills—how responsive they are to particular situations and how competent or successful they are at proceeding along a sustainable joint course of activity, in this case one that seeks to accommodate the values and ends of all those involved.

A Zhuangist ethics of *dào* and *dé* amounts to an eliminativist approach to morality, at least as morality is understood in Sect. 2. It sets aside moral concepts and the notion of moral justification in favor of alternative, ostensibly more fundamental concepts that purport to guide action more effectively while better accommodating the details of particular situations. This essay has attempted only to sketch the framework and core evaluative concepts of such an ethics. A thorough assessment of the Zhuangist approach will require further inquiry along several lines. One would be how this approach is equipped to resolve conflicts between agents, especially when one side does not endorse the Zhuangist understanding of *dào* or “proceeding on both sides.” A deeper understanding is also needed of the reverse sort of situation, the mutual, reciprocal nature of social *dào*-following in cases when various sides do seek to cooperate, described in one memorable passage as a matter of agents “forgetting each other in *dào*-arts” (6/73). Still other crucial questions concern to what extent the Zhuangist approach may be intertwined with a particular normative understanding of human psychology. If Zhuangist ethics presupposes an implausible or impracticable view of agency, the approach may founder. Conversely, to the extent that Zhuangist conceptions of the nature of agency and the motives of the flourishing agent are plausible and attractive, the grounds for the accompanying normative approach to interpersonal conduct may be strengthened.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The author acknowledges research support from the General Research Fund scheme of the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong.



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## Chapter 24

# “Let the Parents Forget You”: Filial Piety (*xiao* 孝) in the *Zhuangzi*



Wai Wai Chiu

## 1 Introduction

It is well known that traditional Chinese culture gives special weight to family life and understands and arranges other forms of social interaction by drawing on ideas of family (Liang 1969: 11–13), especially the idea of filial piety. Since the twentieth century, however, the traditional conception of filial piety has been negotiating its place in the process of modernization and facing the West. As Li Chenyang states, “filial morality is one of the areas that deeply divide traditional China from the contemporary West” (Li 1997: 219). In academia, there is a continuous debate on whether traditional conceptions of filial piety are still relevant in contemporary societies. Not surprisingly, the debate usually revolves around Confucianism,<sup>1</sup> and relatively little has been said about whether non-Confucian schools can contribute to our understanding of the issue at hand. In this chapter, I contribute to this debate from a different perspective. I articulate a conception of filial piety by drawing on the *Zhuangzi*, in particular its ideas of “forgetting” (*wang* 忘) and “authenticity” (*zhen* 真), and its tendency toward egalitarian modes of interaction. I argue that there are at least two major differences between *Zhuangzi*’s conception of filial piety and that of its Confucian counterparts. First, *Zhuangzi* does not exalt the family as a special organization for moral cultivation. Second, *Zhuangzi* does not regard filial piety as a moral requirement, at least not with the stringency or even

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<sup>1</sup> See Sarkissian (2010) for a good summary of the debate. See also Wee (2014) for a brief comparison of the different theoretical models used by the analytic and Confucian traditions to explain filial piety.

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sacredness usually contained in Confucianism. I also argue that such a conception better fits contemporary views on family life, mainly because it situates the interaction between parents and children within a more egalitarian framework and allows for a more flexible approach.

## 2 The Family as a Human Association

The idea that filial piety is of utmost importance for personal and social development can be readily found in the Confucian classics. The *Analects* 1.2 states<sup>2</sup> that “Filial piety and fraternal duty are the root of a man’s character.”<sup>3</sup> The opening passage of the *Classic of Filial Piety* states that “family reverence is the root of virtue, and whence education itself is born ... This family reverence ... culminates in making a stand of yourself in the world” (Rosemont and Ames 2009: 105). Furthermore, it is well known that the *Great Learning* places the family before the country regarding the progress of virtue. Contemporary Chinese studies continue to develop this emphasis on family and its related duties. For example, Lin An Hong claims that “Our Chinese cultural heritage has Confucianism at its centre. The essence of Confucianism lies in its ethics and morality. Filial Piety, among the traditional ‘five relationships and eight virtues’ (*wu lun ba de* 五倫八德), is classified as the fundamental ethical and moral [requirement]” (Lin 1992: 1, my translation). Wang Ze Ying, quoting Qian Mu’s conception of filial piety, claims that “the happiness enjoyed or gained through filial piety is happiness of virtue and mind ... a form of self-affirmation acquired by ... getting the principle (*li* 理) and comforting one’s heart” (Wang 2014a, b: 175, my translation). That filial piety is the basis of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social order is an orthodox view among Chinese Confucian scholars. In Anglophone academia, Roger Ames states that an insight of Confucianism is that it regards family as the primary ground of social, religious, and cosmic order (Ames 2011: 96–97).<sup>4</sup> Given Ames’ emphasis that no individual can exist prior to the family and community, family should also be the primary ground of *personal* order. David Wong also states that for Confucianism, “caring for others must begin in the family or it will not begin at all,” and that this means that “the Confucian approach to ethics is an extremely practical approach” (1989: 254–55), which he regards as a distinctive merit. Although Wong does not fully agree with

<sup>2</sup> Unless specified, all translations of passages in the *Analects* are taken from Lau (2002) with my adaption.

<sup>3</sup> Lau’s translation is based on a version that contains the character “人” (Lau 2002: 2–3). However, the more common version of this sentence has “仁” (benevolence) instead of “人” (person). As a person’s character should be benevolent in the ideal case, the difference does not affect our discussion.

<sup>4</sup> See also Rosemont and Ames (2009: 59–63).

Ames about the status of community,<sup>5</sup> both scholars acknowledge the primacy of family life.

For Confucians, children become who they are and develop their physical and mental capacities because of their parents' care and nurturing, and for this, children owe their parents a debt that they can never fully repay (Ivanhoe 2004: 193, 195). As the development of these capacities depends on belonging to a warm, supportive, and harmonious family, Confucians tend to recognize families as such. This is a point on which Zhuangzi's<sup>6</sup> view departs from that of the Confucians. In Chapter 4, "Living Among Humans in the World" ("Renjianshi" 人間世), a noble messenger She Gong Zi Gao, who is on a mission to the state of Qi, is feeling great anxiety and seeks out Confucius for advice and relief. A fictional Confucius advises him as follows:

There are two great precautions in the world. One of them is fate, another duty. That a child loves his parents is fate, which cannot be dispelled from the heart. That a minister serves his lord is duty, there is no place where he can be free from his lord, and there is no escape between Heaven and Earth. These are what I call great precautions. This is why in the service of parents there is no higher degree of filial piety than to be contented without choosing a place, in the service of a lord no fuller measure of loyalty than to be contented without choosing a task, and in the service of one's own heart no higher degree of virtue than, without joy and sorrow ever exerting force before it, to know that these things could not be otherwise, and be content with them as fate. It is inherent in serving either as a son or as a minister that there is something which is inevitable. If one carries out his affairs according to actual circumstances and forgets about his own person, what leisure has he for loving life and despising death? (10/4/39–44)

The reason for Zi Gao's great anxiety is that he will face trouble regardless of whether he succeeds in his task. Political affairs can easily become entanglements (*kun* 困), and to live among them is to be like being a rabbit living among snares or a bird living among nets. Unfortunately, entanglement is not restricted to the political realm; it can exist in any human association, as indicated in the chapter title and the lament by Jie Yu near the end of the chapter that the world is full of thistles (12/4/89). Although Zhuangzi is more critical of the court than the family, in both of these forms of human association, he advises detachment from the love of life and despising of death. This suggests that he thinks people in both cases face not only social but also existential problems. It is easy to see that being involved in politics invites pressure and peril, and that there is often a struggle involved in finding a way

<sup>5</sup>Wong (2004: 32) shares the worry of Heiner Roetz that an overemphasis on community may threaten individual rights and leave little room for individuals to critically reflect on their roles and tradition.

<sup>6</sup>I take the majority view that the *Zhuangzi* was written by different people in different periods, and that the Inner Chapters (or at least a significant portion of them) contain the earliest stratum of the text as a whole and the core philosophical vision. Herein, the term "Zhuangzi" refers to the writers of the *Zhuangzi* text, regardless of whether the historical figure, Zhuang Zhou (莊周), wrote any part of it. All references to the Chinese *Zhuangzi* text are to Hong (1986). All of the translations of the *Zhuangzi* in this chapter are my own, although I rely on the following commentaries and translations: Graham (1981), Mair (1994), Chen (2001), and Ziporyn (2009). The arrangement of the order of chapters and sentences follows the explanation in Chen's book.

to respond to commands issued by those who seize power without compromising one's health and integrity. Arguably, there are power relations in the family as well: "The relationship between parents to children is such that [the parents'] commands are to be obeyed regardless of which direction is pointed to" (17/6/56). Since the invention of the Zhou social system combining family relations with power hierarchies (Billeter 2015: 75), the love among family members has been always intertwined with social pressures, to the extent that Zhuangzi advises finding contentment in the inevitability of these pressures just as one deals with other forms of entanglement. With this acknowledged, one can see that the anxiety that Zi Gao feels from being implicated in political affairs can sometimes also arise in the family. A child who is asked by her demanding parents to accomplish something faces a dilemma: if she fails, she will be punished, but if she succeeds, she will be asked to keep up the performance or take up even more difficult tasks next time. Regardless of whether she succeeds, she will face trouble, which means that living in this environment involves great anxiety. Here, Zhuangzi may agree with the Confucians that both familial and political associations are inevitable in our lives, and he might even agree that familial love is a powerful motivational force in human psychology. Nonetheless, whereas Confucians use these insights as the basis of self-cultivation and social harmony, Zhuangzi treats them with caution.

Another parable shows that conflict and burden arise not only because some family members have a bad will or bad character, such as selfishness or violent tendencies. Family life can become an entanglement even when parents actively care for their children. In the accomplishment case just described, the parents might believe that everything they do is for the good of their child, and they may not notice how much pressure they exert on her. Here, it is helpful to recall the parable of the seabird in Chapter 18, "Ultimate Joy" ("Zhile 至樂"):

Once a seabird alighted in the suburbs of Lu. The Marquis of Lu welcomed and banqueted it in his ancestral temple, performed the music of the Nine Shao to entertain it, provided the meats of the Tai Lao sacrifice as delicacies for it. Then the bird stared with dazed eyes and worried and pined, did not dare to eat one slice, did not dare to drink one cup, and within three days it died. This is to nourish a bird as one would have nourished himself, but not to nourish the bird with the nourishment suitable for a bird. (47/18/33–35)

It does not matter whether the Marquis of Lu entertained the bird out of vanity or kindness. As long as he was obsessed with his own conception of what is good and did not see things from the bird's perspective, the tragedy could not be avoided. If we grant that this parable helps us to reflect on our relationships not only with animals but also with humans, then we can see that a tragedy in the human world is that people tend to treat others without considering their differences and particularities. After all, the term "nourishment" (*yang* 養) in the story can refer to the providing for animals as well as for human beings. In a family, when children provide for their parents or vice versa, tragedy will prevail when they take their own preferences as fixed guidance. When one is deluded into thinking that living in the same family implies having the same needs, values, and personalities, then even if she wants to care for others, her family will become like a rabbit snare or a bird net. In fact, the more she cares, the more inescapable the snare and net become.

If family life and family love are inevitable, then to the extent that filial piety consists of this love, it is also inevitable. However, the question for Zhuangzi is not “how should we lay out and prescribe norms for filial piety?” but rather “how can filial piety avoid adding to the problem of entanglement?” To this, Zhuangzi suggests that one can “carry out his affairs according to actual circumstances” and “forget his own person.” We turn first to the latter.

### 3 Filial Piety and Forgetting

When Zhuangzi speaks of forgetting, he is not referring to absent-mindedness, negligence, or the suppression of memory. Rather, he is referring to a state, or the process that constitutes the state, of suspending the conventional understanding or forced awareness of something. This state comes with comfort and peace:

Shoes fit when one forgets about her feet; a belt fits when one forgets about her waist; the heart fits when one forgets about right and wrong; engagement with affairs fits when we neither vary inwardly nor yield to external pressures. Beginning with fitting and never experiencing what does not fit, this is the fitness that forgets about fitting. (50/19/62–64)

We directly experience our feet when we walk, but we usually are not aware of them unless there is a problem with our feet or with something they are in contact with. When we are walking, we thus “forget” that we walk with our feet. Good shoes keep this “forgetting” intact rather than reminding us of our feet. The same applies to a belt, and to a heart that responds and makes distinctions.<sup>7</sup> If we must be reminded of the theoretical or practical distinctions we make, they will become forced or disturbing, and we will not think or act comfortably with them. Now consider this “forgetting” when it is applied to the context of family:

Ultimate benevolence (*ren* 仁) is exalted; of course filial piety is inadequate to describe it. This is not to say that benevolence surpasses filial piety but rather that it does not refer to filial piety. If someone journeys south until reaching Ying and then faces north, he cannot see Mount Ming. Why is this? Because he is so far away from it. Hence it is said that to be filial out of reverence (*jing* 敬) is easy, but to be filial out of care (*ai* 愛) is difficult. To be filial out of care is easy, but to forget one’s parents is difficult. To forget one’s parents is easy, but to cause one’s parents to forget oneself is difficult. To cause one’s parents to forget oneself is easy, but to forget all under heaven is difficult. To forget all under heaven is easy, but to cause all under heaven to forget oneself is difficult. (35/14/8–11)

This rich “parent-forgetting” passage contains an implicit response to the *Analects*.<sup>8</sup> There are at least three points worth considering.

<sup>7</sup>I assume the view that “making distinctions” is the common characteristic of “thinking” and “approval and disapproval,” which is the function of the heart. See Graham (1989: 25). See also Fraser (2013) for a good summary of the relationship among judgment, cognition, and making distinctions.

<sup>8</sup>One can at once recall the *Analects* 2.7: “Nowadays for a man to be filial means no more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even hounds and horses are, in some way, provided

The first is that reverence is at most a superficial form of filial piety. This does not mean that it is wrong to be filial by being reverent, but it is unwise to think that reverence is the final ideal. We can give two reasons to explain Zhuangzi's point. First, without forgetting, reverence in the family context easily leads to alienation. One who is always aware of reverence necessarily puts others either above oneself or outside of one's close range.<sup>9</sup> This is in tension with the intimacy between parents and children, especially when one wants to feel and understand what others are feeling and understanding—to have direct access to others' *qi* 氣. In the well-known "heart-fasting" passage, Confucius tells Yan Hui to listen with *qi*,<sup>10</sup> and at this time, one is immersed in the circumstances without excessive deliberation—that is, the object with which one interacts is "forgotten." A child guided by reverence, however, will see her interaction with her parents through a framework of lower and higher social positions, and thus cannot pay attention to the specifics of the context of the interaction. This will either slow down her response<sup>11</sup> or constrain her expressions of care or happiness.<sup>12</sup> The former leads to friction and the latter leads to frustration, and both lead to alienation. This criticism of reverence is also an implicit criticism of Confucian rites (*li* 禮), as the manner or form by which a child expresses her filial obligations is well-specified by rites<sup>13</sup> and thus has reverence as its essence. The second reason for reverence not being the ideal form of filial piety is that it cannot help to avoid entanglement in the family. We may imagine that, if only counterfactually, the Marquis of Lu in the seabird parable does revere the seabird and treats it as the utmost sacred entity. This still will not prevent the tragedy from happening because another feature of listening with the heart, but not *qi*, is that acting from a fixed rule in the heart rather than the particular situation clouds one's perception (Wong 2005: 98), which reduces the chance of genuinely understanding others.<sup>14</sup> This is not to mention that treating reverence as a social requirement can invite pressure from outside the family. In East Asian societies, social status may well depend on displays of filial virtue. Filial piety is thus not only obedience to one's parents but also to one's peers, superiors, and the public.

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with food. If a man shows no reverence, where is the difference?"

<sup>9</sup> Etymological studies show that the character 敬 originally referred to either a bowing or guarding posture. See Guwenzi Gulin Bianzuan Weiyuanhui (2003: 173–78).

<sup>10</sup> This can refer to Yan Hui's own *qi*, *qi* in the environment, or both. Ultimately, as *qi* is always moving and has no fixed boundary, one's own *qi* and *qi* in the environment cannot be separated.

<sup>11</sup> Especially when the attitude of reverence is accompanied by nervousness.

<sup>12</sup> If the child focuses on reverence, it is difficult for her to express her feelings and emotions. Indeed, psychological research shows that contemporary Chinese parents place more emphasis on the control of behavior and restraint of emotions than Caucasian Americans (Lin and Fu 1990: 431), which may be because of Confucian principles (Lin and Fu 1990: 432).

<sup>13</sup> I take *Analects* 2.5 as stating that rites should be the proper form of expressing filial piety. See also Wee (2014: 90). The problem of rites is further elaborated in the next section.

<sup>14</sup> As stated in the *Zhuangzi* Chapter 6, "The Great Ancestral Teacher" ("Dazongshi 大宗師"), this understanding is achieved by a genuine person (i.e., a person with authenticity). Authenticity is discussed in the next section.



Confucians might respond by saying that reverence does cause parents and children to be less intimate but that this is healthy. “A gentleman keeps his distance from his son” (*Analects* 16.13), and sometimes by not being too close, parents can teach their children more easily and with greater strictness, and prevent them from becoming spoiled. Confucians therefore still have a reason to require children to be filial by being reverent. Zhuangzi might reply that the enhancement of intimacy by forgetting will not spoil children or make them unwilling to learn because some of their own desires are also “forgotten”: in Zi Gao’s story, we are told that a filial son or a loyal minister forgets even their basic interest in choosing a comfortable place or task.

More fundamental to the issue of reverence is the extent to which there is a strong connection between family life and self-cultivation. Here, Zhuangzi challenges the Confucian doctrine that filial piety is essential for ideal personhood.<sup>15</sup> The second point extracted from the parent-forgetting passage is seeing that as an implicit response to the *Analects* 1.2, in which Zhuangzi does not believe that filial piety is the germ of benevolence (or rightness, *yi* 義, for that matter). Here it is useful to distinguish two kinds of benevolence: “ultimate benevolence” and “petty benevolence.” That Zhuangzi makes this distinction can be found in phrases such as “great benevolence is not benevolent” (“*da ren bu ren* 大仁不仁”).<sup>16</sup> In fact, the parent-forgetting passage is part of Zhuangzi’s answer to a question about benevolence raised by a chief minister. At the beginning, Zhuangzi points to tigers and wolves as examples of benevolence because they have strong affection between father and son. This kinship affection, with its intense feelings and strong bonds, is rejected by the chief minister as a case of ultimate benevolence because it involves little intelligence and elegance. Still, many Confucians believe that this kinship affection is inborn and should be developed, and some contemporary scholars argue that this idea has a biological basis (Munro 2005: 50, 58).<sup>17</sup> At this level, filial piety can be regarded as the germ of benevolence because being filial means acknowledging a special obligation to one’s parents, and when this is generalized, it becomes an ethical code that assigns different obligations to different social groups, with familial obligations having greater weight. According to Mencius, Shun’s enfeoffing his brother is a typical example (*Mencius* 5A3).<sup>18</sup> Drawing on this idea, some contemporary Confucian scholars argue that assigning more weight to one’s kin in making

<sup>15</sup> Arguably, this challenge can be already found in the Inner Chapters. For example, Møllgaard argues that the display of people with disabilities and mutilations in Chapter 5 of the *Zhuangzi* serves to criticize the notion of filial piety because Confucians demand that children honor their parents by keeping their bodies whole and intact (Møllgaard 2007: 111–13).

<sup>16</sup> This and many similar phrases appear in the *Zhuangzi* Chapter 2, “Discourse on Equalizing Things” (“*Qiwulun* 齊物論”).

<sup>17</sup> Munro focuses on the Mencian strand of Confucianism, but even non-Mencian Confucians such as Xunzi agree that kin-preference is inborn. The difference is that Xunzi does not think that the inborn kin-preference is good in itself without the operation of rites and therefore that it should not be developed without the regulation of rites.

<sup>18</sup> All translations of passages in the *Mencius* are taken from Lau (2003).

decisions is justified (Munro 2005: 74–77). However, there is more than this to ultimate benevolence: being ultimate, its scope presumably should include all under heaven, and both Confucius and Zhuangzi sometimes refer to heaven as an all-encompassing entity.<sup>19</sup> For Confucians, ultimate benevolence can only be realized by a sage king who governs all under heaven. Mencius, for example, claims that one cannot “rule the Empire equitably except through benevolent government” (*Mencius* 4A1). It is natural for Zhuangzi, who likes to cast doubt on any concrete rule that claims legitimacy or usefulness across different contexts, to think of benevolence (or any virtue) as taking different forms, none of which is the “correct” one. Given that Zhuangzi states that “the direction of benevolence and rightness, the paths of right and wrong, are inextricably confused. How could I know how to discriminate between them?” (6/2/70), the Confucian view that ethical norms for political contexts are extension of norms for familial context should be held in check. If benevolence practiced in a familial context and a political context do not follow the same way, then Zhuangzi is like Mozi, who holds that “for one person there is one [conception of] rightness, for ten people ten [conceptions of] rightness, for a hundred people a hundred [conceptions of] rightness” (*Mozi* 12.1),<sup>20</sup> except that Zhuangzi does not think that we should strive to find a way to unify all these different conceptions. For him, a sage ruler is one who does not rule by unifying rightness and does not bother to exalt any particular conception of virtue for all people,<sup>21</sup> let alone a conception of benevolence and rightness. Paradoxically, this “not-bothering,” or the spirit of non-interference, is the way of realizing ultimate benevolence because it embraces all and lets everyone have their place. It also appreciates diverse ways of living and understanding the world. To attain ultimate benevolence, people must unlearn their completed hearts (*cheng xin* 成心). This is another sense of forgetting: to spontaneously let existing ideas or practices vanish and to allow new ones to emerge. Although in principle, one can do this within the family, it is reasonable to expect that it is easier to accomplish when encountering people with radically different beliefs, customs, and practices and when being attracted by them to the extent that one’s own habits are shaken. Therefore, whereas Confucius states that “while your parents are alive, you should not travel too far afield. If you do travel (*you* 遊), your whereabouts should always be known” (*Analects* 4.19), Zhuangzi advocates precisely the idea of wandering (*you* 遊), which allows one to leave one’s usual living place (11/4/75) or depart from the conventional ideas guiding one’s life

<sup>19</sup> If one focuses on the continuous movement of heaven, it will be an activity rather than an entity. This difference does not affect our discussion.

<sup>20</sup> All translations of passages in the *Mozi* are taken from Johnston (2010).

<sup>21</sup> According to the *Zhuangzi* Chapter 7, “Responding to Emperors and Kings” (“*Yingdiwang* 應帝王”), a sage ruler is supposed to “follow along with things spontaneously and leave no room for personal preference” (20/7/11); only in this way can all under heaven be well governed. In the *Zhuangzi* Chapter 18, it is stated that sage rulers “did not unify people’s capacities and did not set them the same tasks” (47/18/39). *Zhuangzi* Chapter 11, “Preserving and Accepting” (“*Zaiyou* 在宥”), even states that “I have heard of preserving and accepting all under heaven, but I have not heard of governing all under heaven” (25/11/1).

(14/5/52–53).<sup>22</sup> Although these two views are not logically contradictory, it shows that Zhuangzi does not place family as the most important venue for personal cultivation and does not regard filial piety as the root of perfect virtue.

Here is a paradox: when we state that being filial by reverence is in tension with intimacy, we suppose that Zhuangzi wants children to be close to their parents; when we advocate the idea of wandering, we suppose that Zhuangzi wants children to be less close to their parents. This paradox can be found in the general idea of forgetting: On the one hand, when one forgets about *x*, one has direct access to *x* (as in the fitting shoes passage); that is, one is closer to *x*. On the other hand, when one forgets about *x*, one puts aside *x*; that is, one is further from *x*. Can this paradox of filial piety be solved? I think it can, and for this, we need to look at the third point extracted from the parent-forgetting passage.

It is better to be filial out of care than out of reverence, because care alleviates alienation by forgetting the distinction between lower and higher. Care is more equal than reverence and points to others' needs directly. We have to go further, however, because as shown in the seabird parable, care as an intention still cannot avoid entanglement in the family.<sup>23</sup> In going further, we find that Zhuangzi stops mentioning filial piety and instead talks about how one enlarges the scope of forgetting and, in the same process, lets others forget him. The first step of forgetting one's parents is to forget the role of parent and child. The way one comes to see her parents is then freed from conventional expectations. One may still see her mother as a mother, but perhaps also as a mentor, a friend, a beautiful lady,<sup>24</sup> a witness of history,<sup>25</sup> or all of these. One can even appreciate her as a particular person living at the present time and in a particular place. This does not detach her from all social contexts, as human associations are inevitable, but rather opens up more possible ways of interaction. Such openness varies with the scope of forgetting, and when one adopts a way of harmonizing with other people's ways, one can make others forget her as well.<sup>26</sup> When the scope of this forgetting is at its maximum, one can regard any relationship as embedded in a world of infinite possibilities, with the way

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<sup>22</sup> One may wonder whether the contrast here is legitimate, given that the *Analects* refers to physical travel and the *Zhuangzi* to freeing one's spirit. However, in these two texts, physical and spiritual travel are closely related. In the *Analects*, the limitation on physical travel is supported by the overarching concern of filial piety, which shapes, if not restricts, one's behavior, status and thinking style. In the *Zhuangzi*, there are plenty of stories depicting travel to the forest, mountain, or seaside. These can be seen as inviting one to physically leave her comfort zone. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

<sup>23</sup> If one regards care not as an intention but rather as a state of successful assistance and an expression of feelings, then one does minimize entanglement, but this is so only from the perspective of conventional filial piety.

<sup>24</sup> Or a beautiful person, if the term “lady” remains tied up with social expectations.

<sup>25</sup> Depending on the situation, one may even see her mother from a negative perspective. Although this is rare, as doing so may increase the chance of conflict, the possibility is not ruled out.

<sup>26</sup> However, note that Zhuangzi offers no guarantee that this will always be successful. Therefore, it is more difficult to cause one's parents to forget oneself, and this lack of forgetting will sometimes become an obstacle to situating the family in the world without privileging it (i.e., to forget-

that was adhered to before forgetting no more or less than a single possibility among many. There is no need to privilege a particular framework in one's family or to privilege one's family in the world. Confucius says, "let the father act as a father, the son as a son" (*Analects* 12.11), which reflects his doctrine of rectifying names. In practice, rectifying names is supposed to work together with rites as the fundamental form of filial piety.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Zhuangzi's doctrine of forgetting lets the father not claim himself as a father and the son not claim himself as a son. This is not to say that the father can never command the son to be filial (Ivanhoe 2004: 194) or that the son can never command the father to be caring (though these should be rare cases in Zhuangzi's eyes); they can still play the roles that convention stipulates, only without much attachment.<sup>28</sup> Each instance of their interaction, be it commanding, requesting, helping, or sharing, is carried out spontaneously. As said by the fictional character Zi Qi,

The place where I and my son wander is between heaven and earth. I seek joy from heaven with him, I seek subsistence from earth with him. I do not engage in affairs with him, do not undertake plans with him, do not effect prodigies with him. I mount with him on the sincerity of heaven and earth and thus do not come into conflict with things. I always change [according to the situation] with him and do not deliberate for the appropriateness of affairs. (68/24/79–81)

The parent-forgetting passage starts from the perspective of a son, whereas Zi Qi's elaboration starts from that of a father. The message, however, is the same: an ideal father–son relationship<sup>29</sup> is one that dissolves its own special status in the sense that the father and son do not force themselves to fit their respective roles. Moreover, their interaction involves no conflict between each other or between them and other things precisely because they free themselves and each other from roles and names. Forgetting names alleviates one's emotional attachment to them, so one can be fully concentrated in any situation without psychological disturbance and hence have the ability to wander between heaven and earth. There is then no need to give filial piety

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ting all under heaven) because one will need to make special responses based on the recognition that her parents are not practicing forgetting.

<sup>27</sup> Lao Si Guang argues that the doctrine of rectifying names does not in itself prescribe what a person should do, but only states that there *is* something one should do if they bear certain names. See Lao (2002: 119–21). If this is correct, then Confucians need the stipulation of rites to prescribe precisely what a person should do.

<sup>28</sup> In Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, it is stated that the enlightened person considers things as one yet situates each judgment in the realm of the ordinary activities of life (*yu zhu yong* 寓諸庸) (4/2/36). The enlightened person does not simply refrain from making judgments. If we regard role duties as a series of judgments, then the enlightened person need not refrain from performing role duties either; however, she may perform them for reasons other than a firm commitment to role virtues, and in a style different from conventional role models. I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

<sup>29</sup> The same applies to mother–son, father–daughter, and mother–daughter relationships. I believe that Zhuangzi picks out the father–son relationship not because he thinks it is the most important but rather to mock the conventional Confucian perspective.

a privileged status. After all, if “a filial son carrying the medicine to his kind father looks haggard in the face, to the sage it is an embarrassment” (32/12/80).

Zi Qi’s elaboration also reveals how the paradox of filial piety and forgetting can be solved, if not *dissolved*, as the paradox is a problem only when we use a fixed standard to judge whether a child is filial, which is precisely what Zhuangzi challenges. A child who attains the state of forgetting can be comfortable with any circumstance she encounters, including, of course, those within the family. Compared to a person who is filial in a conventional sense, the forgetting child is more intimate with her parents in the sense of having less conflict and burden, but if we compare her mode of action within her family to that outside the family, we find that she is no more attached to her role in the family than to her roles elsewhere. In this sense, she is not more intimate with her parents, as all are wandering between heaven and earth. Therefore, whether she is more intimate with her parents depends on what standard we apply, and Zhuangzi’s point is that there is no fixed answer to which standard is more important. Expanding this point to the general idea of forgetting, we may say that in forgetting, the person can be fully concentrated in every situation because she is empty when listening with *qi*. Being empty, no preconceptions block her understanding and action and she can have direct access to the situation at hand, letting any present way of being fade when it does not fit the current situation. As pointed out by Lee Yearley (1983, 135), this is a combination of detachment and attachment, which is a good interpretation of the attitude that “neither holds nor welcomes, responds but does not retain” (21/7/32–33).

To summarize the parent-forgetting passage, we may say that the openness to more possible moves during the progress of forgetting reduces the chance of conflict. Being bound to fewer particular norms and moves, the chance of being burdened is also reduced. “Putting back” family relationships to the whole world is like putting fish back into rivers and lakes, where they can be free and comfortable. Filial piety works best when it dissolves itself.

## 4 Filial Piety and Authenticity

The discussion of forgetting thus far characterizes the ideal parent–child relationship mainly in negative terms. Although Zhuangzi does not insist on absolving family roles altogether, one may wonder whether there is anything positive about family in Zhuangzi’s account. It is important to note that Zhuangzi cannot *insist* on promoting or rejecting a value to his readers: he cannot form any attachment to things without at the same time preserving a sense of detachment.<sup>30</sup> Still, it can be argued

<sup>30</sup> There is an ongoing debate about the Inner Chapters’ stance on ethics in general. Many scholars regard Zhuangzi as a relativist (Hansen 1992, 290; Eno 1996, 142; Huang 2018, 883), although they hold different conceptions of relativism and draw different practical implications. Hans-Georg Moeller argues that Zhuangzi is agnostic and deconstructs even ethical relativism (Moeller 2009, 30). Chris Fraser thinks that Zhuangzi’s skepticism and relativism are grounded “in a meta-

that to the extent that Zhuangzi preserves the idea of ideal personhood, there should be some non-trivial sense of affirmation to which Zhuangzi ascribes a certain value. A possible candidate for this is the “authentic person” (*zhen ren* 真人) or “authenticity.” That authenticity is related to filial piety can be seen in the *Zhuangzi* Chapter 31, “Old Fisherman” (“*Yufu* 漁父”), in which an old fisherman tells Confucius that

The authentic is the most quintessential, the most sincere. What fails to be quintessential and sincere cannot move others. Thus, forced tears however sorrowful fail to sadden, forced rages however formidable do not strike awe, forced affection however much you smile will not be returned. Authentic sorrow saddens without uttering a sound, authentic rage strikes awe before it bursts out, authentic affection is returned before you smile. The person who is authentic within will be spiritually animated without. This is why we value authenticity. When it is applied to human relations, in service within the family the son is kind and filial, in service within the state the minister is loyal and upright ... the rites are what the convention of the times has established. The authentic is that by which we receive from heaven, it is spontaneous and irreplaceable ... (87/31/32–38)

According to Ikeda Tomohisa,<sup>31</sup> this passage might be part of the latest stratum of the *Zhuangzi* and hence may contain different views from earlier passages. Ikeda himself thinks that Zhuangzi’s view towards filial piety is generally negative, with “Old Fisherman” as an exception. Nonetheless, I think that the negative and positive views in “Old Fisherman” can be reconstructed to support each other in a way that is compatible with Ikeda’s textual studies. We begin by examining two characteristics of authenticity.

The first characteristic is the contrast between rites and authenticity. It is well known that Zhuangzi criticizes Confucian rites<sup>32</sup> and, as mentioned above, regards rites as a source of alienation in the family. Here, Zhuangzi points to a situation in which people are forced by rites to act in certain ways and notes that this is often contrary to the harmony that rites are intended to promote (Li 2014: 57). To act in accordance with rites, it is not uncommon for even family members to put on fake smiles, speak without sincerity, prepare gifts only for the purpose of giving face, and pretend to pay attention to what others say only because of social pressure. As this especially affects those who have less power in a traditional family, women and children are especially vulnerable to the force of rites. Authenticity, in contrast, represents freedom from conventions, not only because an authentic person does not engage in fakery but also because she does not impose conventional rules on herself and others. She relies only on the ability to fine-tune herself to fit every new circumstance. This fine-tuning requires her to detach herself from any fixed rule, which in turn requires the art of forgetting.

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ethical theory about the nature of value, according to which value is inherently plural, perspectival, heterogeneous, and contingent” (Fraser 2009, 440). Without resolving this debate, my point here is that Zhuangzi puts forward certain ideals and values, but their stringency, binding power, and practical implications are indeterminate.

<sup>31</sup> Ikeda (2004: 17, 23).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Cua (1977: 312–15), Fraser (2012: 276–81), Ikeda (2004: 21–23), and Perkins (2014: 166–67).

Besides rites, any conventional rules involve the risk of becoming fossilized and of forming or reinforcing one's completed heart. In this regard, the principle of self-interest is the same as that of following rites. When people are encouraged to chase what they want or what brings benefit to them, they reduce every situation to an opportunity for seizing profit, and it is Hanfei's opinion that this can be found even among parents and children, regardless of whether they love each other.<sup>33</sup> The difference between being obsessed with profit and with rites is that it is more difficult to make a person who is obsessed with the former aware of the problem of alienation, as it is easier to identify oneself with *self*-interest than with rites. Zhuangzi therefore laments of “seeing profit and forgetting authenticity,” as he realizes that everything, including himself, may be tied up in self-interest (54/20/64–65).<sup>34</sup>

Given the contrast between convention and authenticity, we may say that being filial authentically and not being filial conventionally are interdependent. Both depend on the art of forgetting, as an authentic son does not force himself into the role of a son and, as in the parent-forgetting passage, he forgets his parents.

The second characteristic of authenticity is that it is an ability to move others without force.<sup>35</sup> By forgetting, an authentic person avoids succumbing to conventional rules in action, which induces others to perceive that her action comes directly from herself (i.e., that she is acting sincerely). Here, Zhuangzi focuses on our emotions as a means of communication. Only authentic emotions can make others feel what one feels. This dynamic power is called “spiritual” (*shen* 神) when it is expressed. To act spiritually is to move and coordinate with the environment smoothly, elegantly, and efficaciously: two examples are Cook Ding's marvelous performance (7/3/2–8/3/12) and Engraver Qing's beautiful artwork (50/19/54–59). Applying this in the context of filial piety, an authentic son expresses his emotions sincerely so his parents can be in touch with his character without the constraints imposed by convention. This arguably facilitates their communication and enhances mutual understanding. In addition, the sharing of emotions itself constitutes harmony, which is a value generally affirmed in the *Zhuangzi*, although it differs from Confucian harmony by being a spontaneous crossover of different ways of practice rather than a single “correct” way.

One may wonder how humans come to have the capacity of acting authentically. Is the authentic and sincere mode of expression ingrained in people's characteristic tendencies (*xing* 性)? It can be said that conventions easily become pressures because they are contrary to, or distort, our inborn characteristic tendencies.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> From the *Hanfeizi* Chapter 46, “Six Contrarities” (“*Liufan* 六反”).

<sup>34</sup> “Forgetting” here is used in its normal sense of ignoring or neglecting, not in the specific sense of forgetting discussed in this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> For Zhuangzi, although they are sometimes less rigid than policies and legal punishments, rites can still be obstacles to wandering because their regulative nature can make them excessively demanding.

<sup>36</sup> Although some chapters in the *Zhuangzi* (notably Chapters 8 and 9 and the first part of Chapter 11) treat the term 性 as “inborn,” this does not imply that the term itself necessarily refers to inborn features or tendencies. Chapter 19, for example, states that it is a swimmer's 性 to grow up in water



Authenticity, then, is the state in which these tendencies can flow without hindrance. Some scholars have mentioned this possibility (Ikeda 2004: 22; Ivanhoe 2004: 189; Fraser 2012: 276), and the *Zhuangzi* certainly contains passages that contrast inborn features to conventional rules and institutions.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the fisherman's answer in "Old Fisherman" states that authenticity is that which we receive from heaven, and this can easily be interpreted as authenticity being the expression of inborn characteristic tendencies. Further textual support can be found by associating this passage to one in Chapter 17, "Autumn Flood" (*Qiushui* 秋水), that seems to equate "heaven" with "inborn" and "authentic":

Oxen and horses having four feet is what is meant by "heaven." Haltering horses' heads or piercing oxen's noses is what is meant by "human." Therefore it is said, "Do not let human extinguish heaven. Do not let deliberation extinguish what is fated. Do not sacrifice your good name for attainments. If you guard it carefully and do not lose it, this is what is meant by 'returning to the authentic.'" (44/17/51–53)

The combination of "Old Fisherman" and "Autumn Flood" suggests that authentic filial piety is what we receive from heaven, and we have it just as oxen and horses have four feet.<sup>38</sup> While not denying that this claim has textual support, I argue for an alternative account that explains the identification between authenticity and heaven but suspends judgment on whether authenticity is ultimately an expression of one's inborn characteristic tendencies. This suspension is motivated by the following concern: if authentic filial piety is ingrained when we are born, and its content is mainly kinship affection, then this will be in tension with the Zi Gao and parent-forgetting passages. In the Zi Gao passage, it is stated that a child loving his parents is fate, which is inevitable. For the sake of argument, we may grant that this love is inborn. If this love is authentic filial piety, we can deduce that it is inevitable for everyone to have authentic filial piety. In this case, it will be hard to explain why entanglement can arise in a family or how one can come to lose authentic filial piety. In the parent-forgetting passage, Zhuangzi points to the affection between tigers and wolves as an example of petty benevolence, which again suggests that kinship love is inborn. Nonetheless, neither the chief minister nor Zhuangzi think that this love counts as ultimate benevolence, as discussed above in the third section of this chapter. Ultimate benevolence surpasses kinship love and puts family roles on par with, rather than higher than, other social roles. To simply follow inborn kinship love would disregard Zhuangzi's warning that if "someone journeys south until reaching Ying and then faces north, he cannot see Mount Ming."<sup>39</sup> Summarizing these two passages, it is more plausible to say that the inborn tendency to love one's parents is

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and become comfortable with it (50/19/53). My discussion here is restricted to inborn characteristic tendencies and not to 性 in general.

<sup>37</sup> Especially in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 and the first part of Chapter 11.

<sup>38</sup> This brings Zhuangzi close to Mencius, who claims that we have sprouts of benevolence and rightness just as we have four limbs (*Mencius* 2A6). Even on this reading, however, Zhuangzi would not regard rites as the natural development of our sprouts.

<sup>39</sup> Ying is a major city within the territory of Chu (楚), a state in southern China. Mount Ming is a legendary mountain in northern China. Zhuangzi is arguing here that the more one insists on devel-

a constraint or simply a *given* in our lives. Authentic filial piety is not achieved by privileging inborn kinship love.

If authenticity is not simply a matter of following what is inborn, what does “receiving from heaven” refer to? My proposal is that it refers to a spontaneous (*ziran* 自然) capacity that we all can have but not necessarily inborn. Consider, for example, the story of Engraver Qing: his bell-stand is a result of “joining heaven to heaven,” which refers to the combination of his state of forgetting by heart-fasting and the natural quality of wood he sees in this state. There is no reason to think that bell-stand-making or heart-fasting are inborn characteristic tendencies of Qing; even so, the focus here is the quality of his activity and not its source. Spontaneous activities are characterized by the apparent absence of deliberation and interference, and a spontaneous agent is free from psychological disturbances. For most people, following what is inborn may very well lead to forming a completed heart, as one usually thinks that what is good for her would also be good for others, or at least that it is good for others to know that that thing is good for her. This is a difference between Zhuangzi and Mencius (Huang 2010: 1060). In the family, it is not always the case that loving one’s parents or children results in providing what is good for them, even if following inborn kinship love. Fitting—and hence forgetting—requires open-mindedness and adaptability, which are unlikely to be inborn, judging from common experience. Even if they are, they still differ from the tendency of loving parents in that they do not involve a particular target in expression.

## 5 Filial Piety in Contemporary Societies

If the above discussion is on the right track, it should be clear that Zhuangzi’s conception of filial piety is different in theory and practice from that in Confucianism. In this section, I give three provisional reasons to support Zhuangzi’s conception as more appropriate in a contemporary social context. This, of course, does not guarantee that the advantages of Zhuangzi’s view can endure the change of social structure.

The first advantage of Zhuangzi’s conception of filial piety concerns the educational role of the family, specifically the extent to which parents are responsible for their children’s good character. Philip Ivanhoe states that parents play a central role in the formation of their children’s characters and the development of their children’s capabilities to live well as human beings, and that this is one solid basis of filial piety (Ivanhoe 2004: 193). This is reasonable to the extent that parents are the first to exert social influence on the child. Nonetheless, how “central” is this role in contemporary society? There is no doubt that parents still play a powerful role, but it is probably not as great as it was in traditional societies, for two reasons. First, as

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oping the aforementioned affection into full-blown benevolence, the more probable it is that one will get lost.

Li says, in ancient agricultural societies, life was far more predictable than it is in modern times, so the knowledge and experience of parents was more reliable (Li 2014: 106). It is much less reliable in contemporary societies, in which there is greater division of labor, more exposure to heterogenous cultures, and more rapid social change. Second, because the scale of the family has diminished, it is more difficult for a family to emulate the complexity of society as a whole, and therefore one has to complete a substantial part of one's education outside of the family; this is especially true in a globalizing age in which an understanding of different cultures and customs is crucial. Zhuangzi's embedding of the family in a larger social context, rather than setting it as the basis for all modes of social interaction, has a better chance of fitting a pluralistic world. The ideas of forgetting and wandering with one's parents can also help to develop new ways of understanding and to bridge generation gaps, for these ideas advise us not to insist on strictly following traditional family roles but also not to insist on rejecting them. This may in turn preserve harmony in the family by reducing pressure.<sup>40</sup>

Even when focusing on aspects over which parents obviously have power to deeply influence their children (for example, the basic manner of reacting to other people's needs and expectations), influence can work both ways rather than being fixed in direction from parents to children, and it is better to influence by non-interference than by indoctrination. As Abraham Maslow says, "in prescribing 'what is best for them [i.e., children]', it looks as if the best technique for finding out what is best for them is to develop techniques for getting *them* to tell us what is best for them" (Maslow 1971: 15). To some Confucians, it may seem strange, if not inappropriate, to think that children can be teachers of their parents. For Zhuangzi, however, this is not a problem. A child may bring a fresh perspective to the family and inspire parents to reflect on themselves, their relationships with other people, or even human existence in general. The scope of this reflection can be extended to the extent that even the roles of parent and child are played flexibly. From the perspective of parents, there is no need to always see themselves as parents and thus no need to always demand that their children should be filial. From the perspective of children, there is no need to always see themselves as children and thus no need to bear in mind the stringency of filial piety. From the perspective of spectators, if the parents and children can forget each other, to demand that they should "restore" the role of parent and children may add unnecessary pressure.

Furthermore, parents might fail to be good models or might even hurt their children. Confucians usually require children to remonstrate with reverence.<sup>41</sup> To be fair, this does not mean that children should follow their parents' commands at all costs. Nonetheless, whereas Confucians in these cases focus on how to keep family members in line with what is right, Zhuangzi focuses on how to reduce conflict without insisting on rightness. This problem-solving approach represents a

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<sup>40</sup> Especially if family members are raised in different cultures.

<sup>41</sup> For example, the *Analects* 4.18.

pragmatic concern of Daoism<sup>42</sup> and has been used by some psychologists and psychotherapists as a therapeutic strategy (Maslow 1971; Price 1994; Claypool 2017). It allows for a more balanced way between social expectations (which are inevitable) and the freedom and tranquility of the individual. Here, Confucians may respond by saying that their prescription of remonstrance with reverence is in fact the best way of reducing conflict, given the psychology of parents and children. This is an empirical claim that I have no expertise to evaluate. However, until the claim is confirmed by rigorous empirical research, Zhuangzi’s approach will remain attractive because it does not deny that Confucian methods may be useful occasionally, only adds that gentler and more flexible ways of handling conflict can better preserve health and harmony.

The second advantage of Zhuangzi’s view concerns the difference between family and other modes of intimate human association, especially friendship. Theoretically and practically, many distinctions can be drawn between family members and friends. The question is to what extent the former is similar to the latter in the ideal case. Donald Blakeley compares the idea of friendship in the *Zhuangzi* to that in the *Analects* and *Mencius* and concludes that they share several formal features, including reciprocity, the sharing of values, and mutual respect. However, he also notes that the substance of friendship is different (2008: 329–32).<sup>43</sup> I believe that there is another difference, namely the priority between filial piety and friendship. Confucians tend to say that although there can be overlapping areas between the idea of filial piety and friendship, there are also certain irreducible differences (Wee 2014: 93–94), and filial piety is more fundamental. As mentioned above, Confucians regard family as the primary ground of all kinds of social order. Zhuangzi, however, usually chooses friendship as the context to express his key ideas, and even overturns the father–son relationship by telling a story in which Confucius wants to be Yan Hui’s follower (17/6/93).<sup>44</sup> One reason for this approach is that friendship, compared to four other common relationships among people, is freer and more equal. It comes closest to Zhuangzi’s ideas of wandering and ultimate benevolence. As the ideal father–son relationship for Zhuangzi is one in which both parties forget their roles and can wander between heaven and earth,<sup>45</sup> it can be said that Zhuangzi allows more room for transforming filial piety into friendship—or, more precisely, into harmony between fellow wanderers. Given that in

<sup>42</sup> The term “Daoism” is used only retrospectively. Unlike Confucians and Mohists, no one regarded themselves as “Daoists” in the pre-Qin period.

<sup>43</sup> According to Blakeley, the *Analects* and the *Mencius* place friendship in the context of cultivating benevolence. One implication of this interpretation, I believe, is that one’s expression of benevolence and one’s choice of friends are mutually dependent. This interdependence constitutes the fabric of virtuous politics and society. Zhuangzi, however, “exercise[s] a negative polemic on every position and flaunt[s] the social and political realities that are taken to be the proper context of cultivating a flourishing human life” (2008: 332).

<sup>44</sup> Yan Hui is not Confucius’s son, but Confucius himself said that he treated him like a son—perhaps more than a son. See the *Analects* 11.7–11.11.

<sup>45</sup> Refer to Zi Qi’s story in the third section of this chapter.

contemporary societies, parents are less identified as authority figures and Confucian rites are less identified as the moral code,<sup>46</sup> the Confucian conception of filial piety needs to be made more egalitarian if it is to have practical relevance and face less resistance. Eventually, it may become very close to Zhuangzi's model of friendship, which is able to harmonize a child and her parents with the social environment in which they are situated. Li says that traditionally, the relationship between father and son is vertical (most unequal) and that between friends is horizontal (most equal) (2014: 102–3). We can say that, for Zhuangzi, the vertical can also become horizontal—or, more precisely, that the distinction between vertical and horizontal is blurred.

The third advantage concerns the status of filial piety in the socio-political domain. The debate over whether Confucian filial piety is compatible with social justice and whether it is a source of corruption is certainly heated in contemporary China.<sup>47</sup> Traditionally, there is no doubt that the state has actively promoted filial piety and usually set it as an important item on the political agenda (Lü 2011: 35–40), although it should be emphasized that whether this was the real intention of the Confucian founders remains controversial. However, while a government can still try to promote filial piety as a virtue today, it is hard to construct it as overriding other virtues, especially those values that are widely recognized in modern societies, such as freedom, equality, and pluralism. At most, people may try to argue that the former can be accommodated within the latter, but then it is unclear whether this accommodation is best done by drawing on Confucian rather than non-Confucian ideas. Zhuangzi's view avoids a conflict inside Confucianism between the privileged status of filial piety and the goal of realizing harmony in society. As discussed above, Zhuangzi's conception of filial piety works best when it dissolves itself. There is no need to privilege any human association; rather, the ideal society has room for everyone and no rigid distinctions between the higher and lower, great and petty, or in-group and out-group. This is precisely the state that can be achieved when everyone forgets the world and lets the world forget them. Although the rationale is different from that of dominant liberal ideas, in practice Zhuangzi can appreciate an emphasis being placed on freedom rather than state authority. Confucians can argue that Confucianism presents a critique of contemporary liberalism, and especially of its purported overemphasis on individual rights, such that it is an advantage and not a problem of Confucianism for it to be less fitting in contemporary societies. However, Zhuangzi's view shares this advantage as well. This is because he can accept that an overemphasis on individual rights may disrupt one's authenticity. Rights are claims that a person can make on others, and this may cause conflict or a burden because it can be done with force. When used in this way, rights hamper one's ability to wander. An insistence on rights also makes it difficult to

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<sup>46</sup> Especially when we consider their religious dimension. This is not to say that they cannot be accepted as religious practices in contemporary societies, but that their appeal faces great challenges if one wants them to be universalized to the same degree as in traditional China.

<sup>47</sup> For a recent summary of this debate in the academy, see Wang (2014a, b). See also Sarkissian (2020) for a discussion of empirical research related to the debate.

achieve the state of forgetting. Although Zhuangzi appreciates the emphasis on freedom, he can still remain at a distance from dominant liberal ideas and not regard the combination of them as the correct way of life, much less their individualistic assumptions.

## 6 Conclusion

There is a well-known idiom in Chinese culture: “Filial piety comes first among all good deeds” (*bai shan xiao wei xian* 百善孝為先). For over a thousand years, filial piety has been a basic moral requirement for every Chinese. While this idea no doubt receives its finest treatment and highest exaltation in Confucianism, other schools also respond to it and contribute to Chinese thought as a whole. Revisiting their views may give us alternative resources to understand and develop the cultural heritage at present, especially if we consider the Chinese tradition as a continuous dialogue between different views rather than a monolithic system.

Zhuangzi’s view is valuable not only for providing a viable alternative to the dominant Confucian theories but also for its insight into the method of dealing with the almost inevitable conflict and burdens involved in families and in human association generally. Its ideas of forgetting and authenticity give us a picture of fulfilling the goals of filial piety without being entangled by them. Of course, this is not easy; as Zhuangzi says,

Besides, to ride along with things as you let the heart to wander, and entrust yourself to what is inevitable and thereby nourish your centre, this is the ultimate course. The important thing is to fulfill what is ordained, and that is the hardest of all. (10/4/52–53)

Its difficulty may be one reason why Zhuangzi’s conception of filial piety has been neglected for a long time, but in the stressful and demanding conditions of contemporary life, it might very well serve therapeutic ends.

**Acknowledgments** A draft version of this paper was presented at the 19th International Conference on Chinese Philosophy in Hong Kong, 2015. I thank the organizers and participants who gave me feedback. I also thank Kim-Chong Chong and an anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments.

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# Chapter 25

## Personal Freedom and the Good Life in the *Zhuangzi*



Tao Jiang

### 1 Introduction

A good life in traditional Chinese discourse is taken to be one wherein one fulfills one's destiny in life, and for a person of the educated class that usually meant serving in the state bureaucracy (Pines 2009: 161). This is taken to be the received Confucian perspective on what constitutes a good and fulfilling life. Confucian cultivation and education prepares one for the office (學而優則士) if conditions are right (天下有道). Due to such a preoccupation with public office as the defining marker of a fulfilling and good life for the educated elite, the dominant Chinese intellectual discourse on good life tends to emphasize the realization of one's moral ambitions in transforming the world according to the Confucian ideals and regard its frustration as unfortunate and disappointing. Confucius lamented in *Analects* 9.9 that he was running out of time as there was no sage king on the horizon to realize his cherished ideals in the world.

Many contemporary scholars have demonstrated that the ideal Confucian good life is first and foremost about following the Dao which brings its own joy to the practitioners far greater than serving in the government. As P.J. Ivanhoe observes in his essay "Happiness in Early Chinese Thought," according to Confucius "those who embrace the Dao find in it a special reservoir of satisfaction and happiness that sustains them in the worst of times and nourishes, fulfills, and delights them when things go well" (Ivanhoe 2013: 267). That is, the joy in following the Dao is its own

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Some of the materials in this essay are taken and revised from Chapter 5 of my book, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China: Contestation of Humaneness, Justice, and Personal Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

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reward on the one hand and can sustain one during difficult time on the other. Indeed, as the opening verse of the *Analects* proclaims, “To remain unrecognized by others and yet remain free of resentment—is this not the mark of the gentleman?” (*Analects* 1.1). Still, not being able to put one’s political ideal into effect, for whatever reason, is always a source of regret for many Confucians. Indeed, when such a pursuit is frustrated, either due to the immorality of the rulers or one’s inability to secure a position, disillusioned Chinese educated elite often turned to the hermitic discourse, most famously represented by the *Zhuangzi*, for consolation.

Zhuangzi and the Zhuangist discourse it inspired constitutes a major exception to what has come to be perceived as the norm of a good life in Confucianism. Zhuangzi explicitly rejects the imperative to serve the state and instead proposes an alternative model of good and meaningful life away from officialdom. The Zhuangist vision provides a luring alternative way of life to the office-preoccupied Chinese educated elite that is even more fulfilling, instead of being a “second-best” option for frustrated and unfulfilled intellectuals. The *Zhuangzi* vastly enriches the intellectual repertoire of what constitutes a good life in the traditional Chinese *imaginaire*.

A good life for Zhuangzi is a life in which one gets to live out one’s naturally allotted years in a way that is unencumbered by social entanglements, political constraints, and moral artifices. In other words, the pursuit of personal freedom is the core drive in the Zhuangist vision of a good life. As Ivanhoe summarizes,

One of the first and greatest advantages enjoyed by those who follow the [Zhuangist] Dao is freedom from most of the concerns, fears, and anxieties that plague most people’s lives. The Dao relieves one of many of the most vexing aspects of normal human life. Followers of the Dao are urged to abandon the frenzied and pointless rush to accumulate wealth, power, prestige and all the other goods commonly associated with “happiness.” They are to do this by engaging in a process of “fasting” and “forgetting,” in the course of which they empty their hearts and minds of these seductive but toxic ideals and goals. The Dao “gathers” in the empty and unstructured space created by this process. While this relief from the troubles of ordinary human life is most welcome and desirable, it is not the ultimate aim of Zhuangzi’s recommended form of life. His true goal is to accord with the Dao and live a life characterized by the “free and easy wandering” (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊) that serves as the theme of the opening chapter of the text. (Ivanhoe 2013: 270)

The *Zhuangzi* expresses a powerful yearning for personal freedom that liberates us from the confining world. Such a vision of a good life is unique amongst its contemporaries in that it rejects political office as a marker of a fulfilling life at all. Due to the prominence of personal freedom in the Zhuangist project and its singular uniqueness in the traditional Chinese philosophical discourse, I would like to take a close look at how freedom is formulated in the text and how freedom is related to this Zhuangist vision of a good life.

The Zhuangist *imaginaire* of freedom can be understood in terms of two kinds of space wherein the heartmind<sup>1</sup> can roam freely (*you* 遊). In its common usage, *you* simply means “to travel.” However, in the *Zhuangzi*, *you* takes on a rather peculiar

<sup>1</sup>The Chinese term *xin* 心 is usually translated as heart-mind in contemporary philosophical discourse. Here I am treating the heartmind as a single term as it is in Chinese. For a more detailed discussion of this translation, see Jiang 2021, 45.

array of meanings and a special significance. Even though many of *yous* in the *Zhuangzi* can still be dubbed as travel, it is a travel of a spectacular kind. I will therefore treat such a usage of *you* as a technical Zhuangist term, rendered as roaming or navigating of the heartmind, in order to distinguish it from its common meaning of travel.

The *Zhuangzi* distinguishes two kinds of *you* in the text: *you* within *fang* 方 and *you* without *fang*. Here Zhuangzi, through the mouth of Confucius as often happens in the text, characterizes Confucius' effort as being confined within *fang* and portrays a prototypical Zhuangist who lives away from the ritually constituted world as operating outside *fang*. *Fang* is an important term in this connection. As Mark Berkson observes,

There are at least two possible ways to understand *fang* here. The character can refer to a region or area; it can also refer to a prescription or plan for something. The reference in the passage can be to wandering within or outside either "the realm/domain/world" (Mair, Watson) or "the guidelines/structure" (Graham). Thus, there are a number of interpretive possibilities. The latter translation would suggest that the men are outside the bounds of the social structure, of normative behavior, while Kongzi operates within the structure. The former could mean, with a more "transcendent" reading, that they are moved by forces other than the worldly. The passage suggests that the men are able to move beyond conventional understandings of and approaches to life and death. They forget convention and (or perhaps, because) they forget themselves. (Berkson 2011: 198)

Indeed, we find both physical and non-physical representations of *fang* in the text, as we will see later. I will translate *fang* as the Chinese lifeworld as a way to capture the ritual-constituted world in which pre-modern Chinese were dwelling. Importantly, this ritual-constituted lifeworld encompasses both physical and normative spaces.

Zhuangist freedom is understood in this essay as one that explores two kinds of space, both within and without the lifeworld with their respective physical and normative dimensions. The latter is what we described earlier as the Confucian notion of the good life, or what has come to be associated with the traditional Chinese *fang* or lifeworld. Even though the characterization of the Zhuangist freedom as operating outside *fang* might be paradigmatic in the text, there are nevertheless many prominent cases wherein some impressive people exercise their personal freedom within *fang*. Zhuangzi's *imaginaire* of freedom explores the possibility of navigating both inside and outside such a lifeworld gracefully and effectively. As we will see in the following discussion, the Zhuangist freedom operates both inside and outside the lifeworld, physical and/or normative.

## 2 Freedom as Roaming at the Margin of the Lifeworld

Roaming at the margin of the lifeworld (*fangwai* 方外), beyond the social-political-ethical boundaries, is seen by many as the paradigmatic Zhuangist *imaginaire* of personal freedom. There are two kinds of *fangwai* space in the text, physical and

normative, sometimes intertwining and sometimes distinct from each other. We see many expressions of *fangwai* roaming throughout the text, e.g., roaming between heaven and earth (*you hu tiandi zhi yi qi* 遊乎天地之一氣), into the infinite (*you wuqiong* 遊無窮), beyond the four seas (*you hu sihai zhi wai* 遊乎四海之外), beyond the dust and grime (*you hu chen'gou zhi wai* 遊乎塵垢之外), and so on. In fact, the inherited text of the *Zhuangzi* starts with a soaring image of radical transformation of a giant fish into a giant bird, freely roaming to the limits of the life-world, opening up an immense vista that stretches readers' imaginations and jolts them to go beyond the confines of the limited and limiting daily norms.

The context within which the term *fangwai* appears is rather instructive and has important implications on the Zhuangist *imaginaire* of freedom. In the Da Zong Shi chapter of the Inner Chapters, Confucius asks one of his disciples, Zi Gong, to inquire about the funeral arrangement of a Master Sanghu who has recently died. However, Zi Gong is roundly mocked by Sanghu's friends. A puzzled Zi Gong turns to Confucius for guidance:

What men are these? The decencies of conduct are nothing to them, they treat the very bones of their bodies as outside them. They sing with the corpse right there at their feet, and not a change in the look on their faces. I have no words to name them. What men are these? (Graham 2001: 89)

Zi Gong is clearly disturbed by the extraordinary detachment and apparent uncouthness Sanghu's friends display toward their friends' remains as it deeply offends Zi Gong's Confucian sensitivity toward the ritual order that governs how a funeral is to be performed properly. Upon hearing from Zi Gong, Confucius sighs, offering his confused disciple an explanation that has been used to frame the Zhuangist intellectual and spiritual orientation in contrast with the Confucian one:

"They are the sort that roams beyond the guidelines (*fangwai*)," said Confucius. "I am the sort that roams within the guidelines (*fangnei*). Beyond and within have nothing in common, and to send you to mourn was stupid on my part. They are at the stage of being fellow men with the maker of things, and go roaming in the single breath that breathes through heaven and earth. They think of life as an obstinate wart or a dangling wen, of death as bursting the boil or letting the pus. How should such men as that know death from life, before from after? They borrow right-of-way through the things which are different but put up for the night in that body which is the same. Self-forgetful right down to the liver and the gall, leaving behind their own ears and eyes, turning and revolving, ending and beginning again, unaware of where they start or finish. Heedlessly they go roving beyond the dust and grime, go rambling through the lore in which there's nothing to do. How could they be finicky about the rites of common custom, on watch for the inquisitive eyes and ears of the vulgar?" (Graham 2001: 89–90, with some modifications to clarify the text using Watson's translation)

Here we see the appearance of two critical terms, *fangwai* and *fangnei*, in the *Zhuangzi*. It is significant that these two terms appear within the context of discussing funeral ritual between the Confucians and the Zhuangists.

Death represents a grave moment wherein chaos can ensue due to such a radical rupture of the lifeworld. Ritual responds to such a disruption by carefully choreographing a set of rules that can help mourners cope with the devastating loss of a loved one. Violating the funeral ritual is a blasphemy to the Confucian normative

order constituted by ritual. However, for Zhuangzi, such an elaborate and compulsive observance of death ritual is obsessive and excessive. The Zhuangist attitude toward death breaks all ritual norms forcefully advocated and guarded by the Confucians. For Zhuangzi, the Confucian approach prescribes a problematic framework to interpret life and death (e.g., funeral ritual) that interferes with the ceaseless natural transformations.

Furthermore, for Zhuangzi, the normative Confucian response to death is misguided in that the latter focuses too much on the survivors and the prescriptions to them in dealing with the death of a beloved family member. That is, instead of seeing death as a loss, essentially from the perspective of those left behind by the departed, Zhuangzi is much more future oriented from a perspective of the dying and imagines what it is like to be the one who is going through the process of death and transitioning into the world beyond:

That hugest of clumps of soil loaded me with a body, had me toiling through a life, eased me with old age, rests me with death; therefore that I found it good to live is the very reason why I find it good to die. If today a master swordsmith were smelting metal, and the metal should jump up and say "I insist on being made into an Excalibur", the swordsmith would surely think it metal with a curse on it. If now having once happened on the shape of a man, I were to say "I'll be a man, nothing but a man", he that fashions and transforms us would surely think me a baleful son of man. Now if once and for all I think of heaven and earth as a vast foundry, and the fashioner and transformer as the master smith, wherever I am going why should I object? I'll fall into a sound sleep and wake up fresh. (Graham 2001: 88–89)

What we do not find in such a Zhuangist deliberation on death is its familial, social, political, and moral aspects which tend to dominate the Confucian approach. Rather, Zhuangzi focuses singularly on the dying person, with incredible detachment and sometimes even in a celebratory tone. Put differently, dying in the *Zhuangzi* is more about the dying person than the ones left behind. This explains the rather extraordinary scene in the Da Zong Shi chapter where we find a Mr. Lai on his deathbed. His friend, a Mr. Li, admonishes Lai's family, who are bewailing his impending death, against disturbing Lai as he is going through the radical transformation (*wu da hua* 無怛化). Instead, Li leans against the door and talks to his dying friend about death. The Zhuangist attitude toward a dying loved one is to aid that person as he or she transitions to the yonder world, and not to focus on emotional demonstration, or even indulgence at times, of those left behind. Li's approach to his friend Lai's death is to be with the dying person without disturbing the person who is going through such a difficult process. The minimalist attitude toward death is a sharp contrast with the Confucian interventionist approach via carefully scripted ritual arrangements.

Zhuangzi, through the mouth of Confucius, interprets the Zhuangist thought and behaviors as operating outside the normative space of the ritual-constituted life-world (*fangwai*) and contrasts it with the Confucian thought and practices that are squarely within the lifeworld governed by its ritual norms (*fangnei*). To the Confucians for whom ritual norms reigns supreme, the Zhuangist rejection is both puzzling and blasphemous. However, it is important to observe that Confucius, either in the *Zhuangzi* or in the *Analects*, has demonstrated profound respect and



deep understanding, even appreciation, of those who wander at the margin of the lifeworld and discard the social and ethical norms Confucius himself adamantly defends. The Zhuangists understand themselves to have a “higher” calling, as it were. It is to be aligned with Dao that transcends the ritual norms of the lifeworld. This is the normative and non-physical space of *fangwai*.

However, there are also many references to a kind of *fangwai* that is more physical in nature. The paradigmatic representations of those who are attuned to the Dao beyond the norms of the lifeworld in the *Zhuangzi* are often those who live in the wilderness at the margin of the lifeworld, e.g., hermits. In fact, the *Zhuangzi* contains the most extensive collection of the lives of hermits, real or imagined, in early China. The ideal or idealized space for Chinese hermits is the natural world or an abode close to nature, either in the mountains or on the river (*shan shui* 山水), common subjects in traditional Chinese paintings. We can find both settings in the *Zhuangzi*. Clearly, nature is both physical and normative for the Zhuangists.

In the Xiaoyao You chapter, we see a rather detailed depiction of a daemonic man, a mountain dweller:

In the mountains of far-off Guye there lives a daemonic man, whose skin and flesh are like ice and snow, who is gentle as a virgin. He does not eat the five grains but sucks in the wind and drinks the dew; he rides the vapour of clouds, yokes flying dragons to his chariot, and roams beyond the four seas. When his spirit is concentrated, it keeps creatures free from plagues and makes the grain ripen every year. (Graham 2001: 46, with slight modifications)<sup>2</sup>

Zhuangzi is portraying a daemonic person (*shenren* 神人) in terms of images that are full of symbolism: he resides in a mountain, symbolizing loftiness; the distance with such a world (far-off) captures his disentangled state of being; his skin is like ice and snow, suggesting coldness and detachment; his gentleness and virgin-like state points to his purity and untainted existence away from the world; his sucking in the wind and drinking the dew instead of eating five grains demonstrates his unworldly existence; his ability to roam beyond the four seas represents his unconfined existence that is not limited by space; his concentrated spirit providing a protection of the world gives us a glimpse of his supernatural spiritual potency. This daemonic person dwells in a faraway mountain, a *fangwai* physical space,<sup>3</sup> untainted by worldly entanglements.

The Old Fisherman, one of the Outer Chapters, provides another example of those who live outside the physical space of the lifeworld. This time it is someone who lives on the river, the other idealized space for the hermitic abode in China. Given the rather sophisticated literary and almost cinematographic quality of the writing, unusual among the entire *Zhuangzi* corpus, contemporary scholarship considers it a later addition to the text. The central theme of this chapter is to extol the virtue of *zhen* 真, genuineness or authenticity. Here we see a vivid portrayal of an

<sup>2</sup>The last sentence is revised at the suggestion of Chung-ying Cheng. The original translation is: “When the daemonic in him concentrates it keeps creatures free from plagues and makes the grain ripen every year.”

<sup>3</sup>The daemonic person and the faraway mountain here can be understood metaphorically, as a reviewer points out.

encounter between a hermit, “the old fisherman,” and Confucius, with the former lecturing the latter about genuineness or authenticity and critiquing the stifling impact of ritual. The old fisherman touts the virtue of genuineness which is put in sharp contrast with codified ritual behaviors:

The rites are what the custom of the times has established. The genuine is the means by which we draw upon Heaven, it is spontaneous and irreplaceable. Therefore the sage, taking Heaven as his model, values the genuine and is untrammelled by custom. The fool does the opposite; incapable of taking Heaven as his model he frets about man, ignorant of how to value the genuine he timidly lets himself be altered by custom, and so is an unsatisfied man. What a pity you were steeped so soon in man’s artificialities, and are so late in hearing the greatest Way! (Graham 2001: 252)

Zhuangzi commends the virtues of genuineness, spontaneity, and the natural as expressions of freedom that is untrammelled by customs. The natural genuineness has a power to move people without resorting to coercion, unlike ritual which can coerce people’s behaviors and self-expressions. In other words, in the fisherman’s discussion the natural is set up as the contrast with ritual in representing different ways the world is organized, both inner and outer, with genuineness as the expression of the natural and coercion as the expression of ritual:

When it is applied to relations between men, in service within the family the son is filial and the father compassionate, in service within the state the minister is loyal and the lord just, in a wine-feast you enjoy, in mourning you grieve. What matters in being loyal or just is that you do fulfill the charge, in a wine-feast that you do enjoy, in mourning that you do grieve, in serving parents that you do please them. To the glory of fulfilling the charge you can pick your own route; in serving parents, if you do please them they won’t raise difficulties about how you did it; in the wine-feast, if you do enjoy you won’t finicky about the cups; in mourning, if you do grieve no one quibbles about the rite. (Graham 2001: 251–52)

What is intriguing is that the Zhuangist message here does not actually dispute the goals of the Confucian moral discourse, but rather questions the artificiality created by the Confucian norms that prevents the spontaneous expressions of genuineness and authenticity. In other words, the Zhuangist critique is that forced or unnatural behaviors, codified by rituals and customs, suffocate the expression of genuineness. The old fisherman, clearly speaking as a Zhuangist spokesman, dwells outside the ritual-constituted lifeworld and critiques such a world from the outside. He constantly resorts to Heaven or nature, a standard Zhuangist trope that anchors his project, as a way to break through the thickets of ritual codifications that warp the genuine expressions of human emotions. Any codification to impose the ought onto the what is superfluous and artificial, distorting the natural endowment and expression of a person’s sentiments.

Therefore, *fangwai*, both as a physical space of nature and as a normative space of personal freedom, represents a repudiation of the social-political-ethical norms accumulated and sedimented over generations of ritual practices. A Zhuangist ideal person can dwell in *fangwai*, whether physically, normatively, or both. The Confucians resort to ritual to regulate various relationships and manage change in constructing the Chinese lifeworld. Whereas for the Confucians ritual shapes and acculturates a particular kind of disposition, worldview, and behavior in the making

of a ritual agent as well as a ritualized lifeworld, Zhuangzi resists that very ritualization of the lifeworld, ridiculing the mind-numbing ritual norms and objecting to the ossification of genuine dispositions into dogmatic moralization.

At its core, the Zhuangist freedom is an attempt to challenge the centrality of ritualized lifeworld most Chinese intellectuals embrace and the norms that govern such a world. In fact, the Warring States period was an extremely rare period in Chinese history, wherein the established ritual norms could be and were openly challenged. This explains Confucius' lamentation of the collapse of ritual and music (*libengyuehuai* 禮崩樂壞) during his life time which would progressively get worse for the rest of the classical period. The Zhuangist vision represents one of the most potent, if ultimately futile, challenges to the normative ritual order and the lifeworld that is constituted by such an order while offering Chinese intellectuals an alluring alternative to the dominant political and moral *imaginaire*. This vision was deeply subversive of the normative order constituted by ritual and most forcefully advocated by the Confucians.

However, freedom at *fangwai* does not encompass all of the Zhuangist *imaginaire* of personal freedom. In fact, some of the most compelling and fascinating descriptions of personal freedom are cases wherein a person is operating within the restricted space of ritualized lifeworld and its normative boundaries. Let us take a closer look.

### 3 Freedom as Roaming Within the Lifeworld

Despite the apparent prominence of freedom as roaming outside the lifeworld in the *Zhuangzi*, there is an equally important formulation of personal freedom that accepts the boundaries as inevitable and inescapable and seeks ways to navigate life within those boundaries. This is the second kind of *you*, roaming within the confines of ritualized lifeworld (*fangnei* 方內). This aspect of the Zhuangist freedom represents “the freedom that *roams in between* constraints” (Cook 1997: 540, original italics). It is subtler, though no less compelling, in the text.

In this connection we find Zhuangzi, in the Ren Jian Shi 人間世 chapter, somewhat uncharacteristically as Graham observes (Graham 2001: 71), talks in some length about obligation to the parents and duty to the ruler. Through the mouth of Confucius, Zhuangzi lays out two constraints for living in the world, namely destiny (*ming*, 命) and duty (*yi*, 義). The former refers to one's filial love of one's parents and the latter a minister's service to his lord. According to Zhuangzi, there is no escape from these two supreme constraints (無所逃於天地之間, 是之謂大戒). This means that for a Zhuangist these two constraints constitute the ultimate limiting condition for living in the lifeworld. One can leave behind other norms and boundaries, except these two. Such a stipulation limits the subversiveness of the Zhuangist vision of personal freedom as we have just seen previously. This is Zhuangzi's struggle with the ritual-constituted lifeworld whose norms are governed by the expected commitment to filial piety as well as the political obligation of

serving the state. Interestingly though, there is very little discussion on filial love in the text whereas there is significant effort devoted to the topic of serving the state. This suggests the thorniness of the issue of serving the state whereas one's filial love of parents is much less problematic for Zhuangzi.

However, the Zhuangist *you* within the lifeworld should not be equivocated with the Confucian approach despite the fact that it is Confucius in the *Zhuangzi* who proposes the *fangwai* and *fangnei* differentiation and claims *fangnei* to himself while leaving *fangwai* to the Zhuangists. In other words, Zhuangzi's roaming within *fangnei* is not the same as the Confucian way even though both are operative in the lifeworld. The celebrated story of the butcher, Cook Ding (*paoding* 庖丁), in the Yangsheng Zhu 養生主 chapter, offers the most illuminating example of the distinct Zhuangist *you* within the lifeworld in its portrayal of a butcher's supremely attuned senses and daemonically guided actions when roaming between the constraints within an ox. There Cook Ding is depicted as performing a fantastic feat of untangling the massively intricate body of an ox (*jie niu* 解牛):

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee—zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Jingshou music. (Watson 2013: 19)

As Burton Watson points out in the note to his translation, “The Mulberry Grove is identified as a rain dance from the time of King Tang of the Shang dynasty, and the Jingshou music, as part of a longer composition from the time of Yao” (Watson 2013, 19). It is rather intriguing that Zhuangzi portrays Cook Ding's feat as similar in kind to a performance in a carefully prescribed state ritual, a highly confining ritual occasion, with the lord present. His execution is exquisite and precise, hitting all the right notes while smoothly cutting open the body of an ox without hacking his way through.

Cook Ding explains to the awe-struck Lord Wenhui that he is actually interested in the Dao which is beyond skill. He describes the different stages of learning the butchery craft in terms of different perceptions that become available to him as a result of the deepening knowledge of the ox. At the beginning, he sees the whole ox, unable to cope with the intricacy of the complex bodily structure; gradually he is able to discern bone and muscle patterns, which makes his work easier as he can follow along those patterns without having to constantly hack his way through as he has to at the beginning; eventually he discovers that there are actually paths inside the ox, even though they are normally invisible. The butcher describes how the discovery of such paths enables him to run the chopper more gracefully and effectively: “At that joint there is an interval, and the chopper's edge has no thickness; if you insert what has no thickness where there is an interval, then, what more could you ask, of course there is ample room to move the edge about” (Graham 2001: 64).

What is extraordinary in the above description is Cook Ding's discernment of an interval in a joint (*you jian* 有間) and his realization of thicklessness of his chopper's edge (*wu hou* 無厚). Neither is apparent from an ordinary perspective. Clearly in the butcher's long years of practice, his perception of the ox has been transformed

such that the intervals of the ox's joints are brought into the open enabling him to run his chopper through the interval as if the chopper's edge had no thickness. Put differently, in his cutting, or rather disentangling, of an ox, the butcher is no longer his ordinary self while the ox is no longer an ox to an ordinary person. Both are transformed in such a way that neither the butcher nor the ox stands in the way of the other.<sup>4</sup> Here Zhuangzi paints a picture of attunement with nature wherein the transformed self is perfectly aligned with the axis of the Dao (to use the Zhuangist language).

The ox is a metaphor for the intricacy and complexity of the ritual-constituted lifeworld.<sup>5</sup> This is why Zhuangzi compares the butcher's act to a performance in a state ritual. It also explains the lesson, on how to nurture life, learned by Lord Wenhui from the butcher's conduct and explanation. The bones and joints symbolize the rules and norms of the lifeworld that should not be violated while the butcher qua chopper represents a Zhuangist agent. A Zhuangist daemonic person can find the path of least or no resistance in accomplishing what s/he sets out to do when navigating the lifeworld, similar to the butcher who can discern a space between joints when running his chopper. Such a person can roam the lifeworld without having to force their way through, by exploring route and ways invisible and unavailable to the undiscerning. Zhuangzi calls this state, wherein a daemonic person finds the path of no or little resistance, "the Great Attunement," "the Great Thoroughfare," or "the Great Openness."<sup>6</sup> As Slingerland points out, "The freedom that Zhuangzi advocates is a freedom to act *properly* in response to a given situation, and thus represents a subtle combination of freedom and constraint" (Slingerland 2003, 206, original italics). Indeed, this is the kind of freedom within the constraint of the ritual-constituted lifeworld and its norms.

What is especially noteworthy is the fact that Lord Wenhui admits he has learned something invaluable from a lowly butcher's explanation of his craft. Here Cook Ding is portrayed as someone who has completely mastered the intricacies of ritual performance while finding ways to avoid being injured by the ritual-regulated lifeworld. The fact that this comes from a lowly butcher again points to the Zhuangist ideal of personal freedom that is rather subversive of the hierarchy embedded in the lifeworld and the norms it embodies.

Another case of roaming within boundaries is found in the expression 遊其樊 which means "roaming free inside his (the king's) cage." This is a much more

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<sup>4</sup>As Chung-ying Cheng points out to me, the ox might not agree! This is of course right, but I am interpreting the ox metaphorically, representing the intricacy and complexity of the world as we will see in the following.

<sup>5</sup>I am echoing an interpretation advanced by Robert Eno in his essay "Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy," in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, eds. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: SUNY, 1996).

<sup>6</sup>Brook Ziporyn, trans., *Zhuangzi*, 49 fn. Graham translates it as "the universal thoroughfare." Ziporyn renders *datong* as "Great Openness" even though he amends it as *huatong* (化通) by adopting a parallel in the *Huainanzi*. Mair's translation as "the Transformational Thoroughfare" follows the same textual change (Mair 1997: 64).

perilous form of navigating one's way within the lifeworld, given the vast imbalance of power between the two parties involved and the extreme restrictions encountered. The larger context of this is a discussion on how a Zhuangist sage can bring his wayward ruler closer to the Way, in a conversation between Yan Hui and Confucius before Yan Hui embarks on the trip to persuade the lord of Wei to change his tyrannical ways. Confucius proposes the fasting of the heartmind to help Yan Hui prepare himself. As Graham points out, Zhuangzi is making an observation that "it is easy to withdraw from the world as a hermit, hard to remain above the world while living in it" (Graham 2001: 69). This is precisely the kind of roaming that takes place within the boundaries of the lifeworld without being bound by them, as opposed to transcending such boundaries which is paradigmatic in the Zhuangist thought as we have seen above.

However, Zhuangzi is clearly struggling with the idea of freedom within the confines of the ritual-constituted lifeworld. In the *Qi Wu Lun* 齊物論 chapter, he recommends that we should "Forget the years, forget duty, be shaken into motion by the limitless, and so find things their lodging-places in the limitless" 忘年忘義, 於無竟, 寓諸無竟 (Graham 2001: 60). This advice is offered in the context of discussing how to settle a disputation and adjudicate various alternatives. Here Zhuangzi does not see any limiting condition for living freely, including the duty to one's lord, and instead advocates leaving it behind, in contradiction to the passage in the *Ren Jian Shi* 人間世 chapter as we saw previously. Here we see a case of the intrusion of the ever-present paradigmatic Zhuangist impulse to leave the lifeworld and its restrictive and often perilous norms behind, clearly as a demonstration of his frustration with the lifeworld.

Such a rejection of the duty to serve the state is even more pronounced in some of the Outer Chapters. The most famous example can be found in the *Autumn Floods* 秋水 chapter wherein Zhuangzi compares someone who serves the state to an enshrined dead tortoise and asks the king's two emissaries: "Would this tortoise rather be dead, to be honored as preserved bones? Or would it rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud?" 此龜者, 其死為留骨而貴乎, 其生而曳尾於塗中乎 (Graham 2001: 122). Once the two emissaries reply that the tortoise would prefer the latter, Zhuangzi demands that they leave him alone, "Away with you! I shall drag my tail in the mud" 往矣! 吾將曳尾於塗中 (*ibid.*). Essentially, on such occasions the *Zhuangzi* resorts to *fangwai* as the way to escape from *fangnei* obligations, more aligned with the sentiment to leave all such social-political obligations behind (*wang yi*). This contradicts the Zhuangist dictum about two constraints (or inescapable obligations in Zhuangzi's term) in the lifeworld (無所逃於天地之間) one of which is serving one's lord, mentioned earlier in the essay. I do not think the tension between these two kinds of *you* 遊 is satisfactorily resolved within the text.

The call to forget years and obligations touches another motif in the Zhuangist freedom within the lifeworld. This is the theme of forgetting (*wang* 忘) that is prominent in the *Zhuangzi*. It is used in connection with sitting (*zuo wang*) in describing a rarified state of self-cultivation wherein the everyday cognition drops away and the daemonic comes in. *Wang* also has a social aspect. The social expression of such a freedom is understood in the *Zhuangzi* as one wherein everybody is no longer



consciously upholding morals and values. Instead, they just forget each other and let each other be. The most famous instance of forgetting in a social context is pronounced, ironically and playfully of course, through the mouth of Confucius on the spuriousness of morals and values:

When the spring dries up and the fish are stranded together on land, they spit moisture at each other and soak each other in the foam, but they would be better off forgetting each other in the Yangtse or the Lakes. Rather than praise sage Yao and condemn tyrant Chieh, we should be better off if we could forget them both and let their Ways enter the transformations. As the saying goes, “Fish forget all about each other in the Yangtse and the Lakes, men forget all about each other in the lore of the Way.” (Graham 2001: 90)

Commentators usually interpret the Zhuangist forgetting as the manifestation of an un-self-aware spontaneity, a consummate virtue in classical Chinese thought that is key to the idea of personal freedom in the *Zhuangzi*. However, such an interpretation under-appreciates the social and political aspects of the idea of *wang*. Socially it can be interpreted as leaving each other alone or letting each other be. This reading is supported by the use of *wang* in the peculiar Zhuangist discourse on friendship.

The Da Zong Shi chapter describes an interesting group of friends, Zi Sanghu 子桑戶, Meng Zifan 孟子反, and Zi Qinzhang 子琴張, whose take of friendship is rather unusual, to say the least:

“Which of us can be *with* where there is no being with, be *for* where there is no being for?  
Which of us are able to climb the sky and roam the mists and go whirling into the infinite, living forgetful of each other for ever and ever?”

The three men looked at each other and smiled, and none was reluctant in his heart. So they became friends. (Graham 2001: 89, original italics)

What is striking here is the peculiar way ideal Zhuangist friendship is depicted as friends forgetting each other and letting each other be who they want to be. Apparently, even friendly entanglement for Zhuangzi should be resisted and rejected.

Relationality is one of two dominant features of the lifeworld—the other being change—which sets the boundaries for the Zhuangist freedom within the lifeworld. So far two relationships have been highlighted: relationships with one’s parents and with one’s lord. Both are hierarchical in nature. Even though Zhuangzi acknowledges the inescapability of these two relationships, they are hardly the ideal ones relished in the text. If the paradigm of ideal human relationality in the Confucian universe is family relationship, in the Zhuangist universe ideal relationship is one that exists between friends who are equal among themselves. Whereas the Confucians tend to reduce friendship to sibling relationship within a family, for Zhuangzi true friendship is a completely different category of relationship that is irreducibly *sui generis*. While Zhuangzi acknowledges, grudgingly, the inescapability of one’s relationship with one’s parents (*ming*) and one’s lord (*yi*), it is the relationship between like-minded friends that is celebrated in the text. For Zhuangzi, only the best kind of friendship can be one that allows each other to be, free from the emotional and moral entanglements.

Zhuangzi’s friendship with Hui Shi is legendary: Hui Shi is practically the only thinker with whom Zhuangzi is portrayed to have a sustained engagement in the text



itself and many of the famous episodes of their encounters constitute the core appeal of the *Zhuangzi*, e.g., their delightful quibble over whether a person can know if a fish is happy or not. After Hui Shi dies, Zhuangzi laments that he has now lost a partner with whom alone he can talk about things (Graham 2001: 124). Such an expression of lamentation has prompted some modern commentators to muse, quite sensibly, that Zhuangzi really should have been more embracing of emotional expressions of human relationships like the Confucians, e.g., David Nivison (Nivison 1991: 139). However, we do not have to hold Zhuangzi to the view that somehow he is against expressing sorrow as some writings in the text seem to suggest. Rather, as Mark Berkson has observed, Zhuangzi is against prolonged grief since he regards it as “the result of tendencies of the mind that produce disturbance and reveal a misunderstanding about the nature of things and an inability to accept change” (Berkson 2011: 200). That is, we can interpret the Zhuangist attitude toward sorrow as that he is not against sorrow per se but that he is against the kind of sorrow that interferes with the process of transformation.

At times Zhuangzi elevates friendship even above the sacrosanct familial relationship. This is clearly exemplified in the way Mr. Li talks to Mr. Lai’s family when Mr. Lai is on the verge of death and in Zhuangzi’s lamentation over the death of Hui Shi. When Mr. Lai is on the verge of death and his wife and children are bewailing him, Mr. Li warns them, “Don’t startle him while he transforms” *wu da hua* 無怛化 (Graham 2001: 88). In such a case, Mr. Lai’s family is clearly observing the traditional ritual of sending off a dying beloved family member, but Mr. Li speaks to Mr. Lai’s family with a sense of authority implying that the family members do not truly understand Mr. Lai and their bewailing actually impedes the natural transformation Mr. Lai is undergoing.

In many ways, letting each other be (as friends, instead of as family members) is a core Zhuangist social value, in contrast with what he regards as the meddling and intrusive ways of the Confucian and Moist moralists. Such an idea is also carried into Zhuangzi’s discussion about politics. In the last of the Inner Chapters, “Responding to Emperors and Kings” (*Ying Diwang* 應帝王), the *Zhuangzi* offers some thoughts on governance. As Graham (Graham 2001: 94) points out, this is clearly not the kind of subject Zhuangzi devotes a lot of time and effort to. The most relevant passage to our discussion here in that chapter addresses the ideal of an enlightened kingship:

When the enlightened king rules  
His deeds spread over the whole world  
but seem not from himself:  
His riches are loaned to the myriad things  
but the people do not depend on him.  
He is there, but no one mentions his name.  
He lets things find their own delight. (Graham 2001: 96)

This represents the Zhuangist ideal that a sage-king who rules the least and is not imposing rules the best. He just lets everybody be. The *Laozi* has a similar take on the ideal governance and is much more developed than the *Zhuangzi* in discussing the ideal “Daoist” sage-ruler.

It is obvious that Zhuangzi does not enjoy discussing the state, at least not directly and explicitly. For him, serving in political office is like a sacrificial tortoise put at the altar of power. As we have seen earlier in this essay, compared with the Confucians who see serving in political office when the timing is right as one of the most fulfilling and meaningful aspects of a good life, Zhuangzi's general attitude towards politics in general is that of futility and aversion, despite occasional forays into the tactics of political persuasion. This explains the limited contribution the *Zhuangzi* makes to the traditional Chinese political discourse. For those who want to get away from politics (e.g., hermits) or are frustrated in pursuing their political ambitions (e.g., exiled scholar-officials), the *Zhuangzi* is their counsel and comfort. Other than that, the *Zhuangzi* has not been a major voice in traditional Chinese political discourse, especially the political discourse on freedom where it could have made the most powerful contribution. Unfortunately, freedom has never been part of the mainstream political discourse in pre-modern Chinese intellectual debates. Freedom has always been taken to belong to the realm of one's heartmind and the relevance of freedom to the social-political-moral discourse has always been treated with suspicion (Wu 2006: 219).

## 4 Conclusion

As we have seen at the beginning of this essay, a good life for Zhuangzi is a life in which one gets to live out one's naturally allotted years and in a way that is unencumbered by social entanglements, political constraints, and moral artifices. Personal freedom is at the core of such a vision of the good life. In this essay, I have sketched out a uniquely Zhuangist conception of freedom in terms of two spaces wherein a person's heartmind can roam freely. Such a freedom thrives in personal space with its characteristic ambivalence toward the state. Zhuangzi's antipathy towards moral monopoly, social conformity, and political tyranny is evident throughout the text. He seeks salvation in the personal which is a reimagined space of freedom radically different and separated from the social and the political domains.

In Chinese intellectual history, the Zhuangist vision of a good life has offered a major alternative to the Confucian imperative of serving the state and promoting the Confucian ideals throughout the world in order to have a more fulfilling life (when conditions are right). As such, Chinese intellectuals find in the *Zhuangzi* invaluable resources of imagining a good life in radically different ways. However, such an attraction is also its own flaw. As I have argued elsewhere (Jiang 2012, 88), it is rather unfortunate that the Zhuangist *imaginaire* of freedom is confined to the domain of the heartmind and is not forcefully carried into the political discourse in reimagining new

possibilities with regard to the state. It never occurs to the Zhuangists<sup>7</sup> that the state can be reconstituted in such a way that its ability to intrude upon people's personal freedom can be kept in check. In other words, the Zhuangists regard freedom as a private enterprise, not as a political institution. Therefore, it is no surprise that we do not find any codification of personal freedom in institutional building in pre-modern China. Consequently, it is left to each person themselves to cultivate a personal space in order to enjoy some personal freedom within the lifeworld, instead of such a personal space being protected in the way political institutions are set up. This has had major consequences in Chinese political history.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>The lack of political imagination is clearly not the fault of the Zhuangists alone. Imagination is socially and culturally conditioned even as it tries to transcend such conditions. The limitation of the Zhuangist political *imaginaire* is in many ways the product of a lack of alternative forms of political systems and institutions in early China.

<sup>8</sup>For a more detailed discussion of the lure and the limitation of the Zhuangist political vision in connection with the Confucian and the Mohist ones, interested readers can check out my book, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China: Contestation of Humaneness, Justice, and Personal Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 2021), especially Chapter 5 and the Conclusion.

# Chapter 26

## The Social and Political Implications of Zhuangzi's Philosophy



Kim-chong Chong

### 1 Introduction

The *Zhuangzi* begins with the fantastic story of a fish transforming into an immeasurably huge bird that whirls into the sky and flies a great distance, wondering whether the blue of the sky is its real color and if it has no end. What sense can we make of this and what can we learn from such a highly imaginative text? Compare this with the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子). It begins with Mencius having an audience with a king who asks, having travelled so far, what advice can he offer to profit his state? The *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), too, begins with Confucius (Kongzi 孔子) mentioning the pleasure of having like-minded friends visit from afar. The like-mindedness here refers to the shared revision and practice of what one has studied and learned. All three texts mention distant travel.<sup>1</sup> Did Zhuangzi deliberately invent the flight of the bird to imply a metaphorical journey far beyond the dimensions of Mencius and Confucian like-minded friends? There is no evidence that he did, and it would be speculative to think that he did so.<sup>2</sup> In a sense that I hope will be made clear later, however, this opening story of the *Zhuangzi* is highly

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<sup>1</sup>I owe this comparison between the initial passages of the *Zhuangzi* on the one hand, and the *Mencius* and the *Analects* on the other, to the Humanities reader compiled by faculty of Fudan University, Shanghai, Yitiao Ketang 一條課堂 (2019: 108).

<sup>2</sup>It would assume, for instance, that Zhuangzi was aware of Mencius's travels, or that he was aware of the *Mencius* or parts of it, and this in turn assumes that the text or parts of it were then already in existence in some form.

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liberating, especially given the comparison of dimensions just mentioned. It also prefigures the philosophy of “the transformation of things” that is central to the *Zhuangzi*.

Right from the beginning, it is not at all evident that the *Zhuangzi* has anything to say about moral, social and political issues, or that there are any social and political implications to be gleaned from it.<sup>3</sup> I will first articulate the reasons why this may generally be thought to be the case. Following this, I shall show that there is, in fact, a resource that we—as readers in the present day—can draw from Zhuangzi’s philosophy for the grounding of values such as equality, diversity and individual liberty or freedom. This is his philosophy of the transformation of things.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 Self-Preservation and Spiritual Withdrawal

The *Zhuangzi* is not evidently a social and political tract. Unlike the *Analects*, *Mencius*, or *Mozzi* (墨子), for instance, it does not contain advice on how to govern, how to maintain social and political order, how to relate to others according to one’s role or status, or the circumstances under which impartiality should or should not be applied. Neither is there any expression of a desire or even an obligation to take office as there is in the *Analects* (Lau 1992: 13.10 and 19.13), for example.

On the contrary, it contains stories such as the following. The sage king Yao wants Xu You to succeed him but the latter replies that he has no use for the position; Confucius advises his disciple Yan Hui against persuading a ruler to govern humanely because he will only bring harm to himself; and Zhuangzi is depicted as dismissing an offer of political office (Watson 1968: 32–33, 54, 188).<sup>5</sup> These stories are congruent with the well-known parable of the tree spared from being chopped down precisely because it was “useless” (Watson 1968: 65). This has been taken to suggest that Zhuangzi was a self-preservationist or “survivalist” given the turbulence of the “Warring States” period (Lin 1989: 398). The editor of the *Zhangguo Ce* (戰國策), Liu Xiang, provides a concise account of this.<sup>6</sup> He writes that toward the end of this period:

<sup>3</sup>I shall not engage in a discussion of who wrote the *Zhuangzi*. The discussion of social and political implications will cover the *Zhuangzi* as a whole.

<sup>4</sup>I shall draw from and further develop material from earlier work (especially Chong 2016).

<sup>5</sup>To facilitate reading, as in this sentence, I shall refrain from providing Chinese characters for all the names of people and places (such as the names of the different states).

<sup>6</sup>The word *ce* may be translated as “stratagems,” “intrigues,” or “plots.” The *Zhangguo Ce* may be translated, for instance, as “Plots of the Warring States.”

Compliance and propriety had vanished and warfare alone was a matter of concern. Humanity and justice had been discarded in favor of deceit and opportunism. Rebels and usurpers had become nobles and princes, which meant the most treacherous states became the greatest powers. Each imitated the other. Newcomer copied predecessor until they consumed each other, joining with larger states or annexing smaller ones. Each year marauding troops would appear again and blood would cover the ground; father and son became estranged, brother was uneasy with brother, husbands and wives were separated from one another and a man could scarcely preserve even his own life—the Way and its Virtue perished in darkness. (Crump 1996: 37)

Given these appalling social conditions, an explanation of the survivalist or self-preservationist strand that can be found in the *Zhuangzi* may be as follows. It has been speculated, for instance, that Zhuangzi was a member of a ruling clan in the state of Song which was deposed by another. Subsequently, Song was conquered by Qi in collusion with Wei and Chu, leading to its complete dissolution. Zhuangzi probably lived through these tragic events and was greatly affected by them. This led to a devotion to spiritual matters (Wang 2012: 169–178).

Perhaps this life experience disillusioned him about the moral, social and political values and ideals advocated by the Confucians and others. Thus, some parts of the *Zhuangzi* express skepticism about moral rules and laws, holding that these were used to instill obedience to the rulers and helped to hide the political realities of both attaining and securing power. For instance, in the chapter “Rifling Trunks” (Qu Qie 胠篋), it is alleged that the sages had helped to secure those who had attained power through stealth and violence when they devised moral rules, laws and institutions of governance. A historical example is cited of how Tian Cheng Zi (田成子) “stole” the state of Qi by murdering its ruler. The laws of the state ensured that his descendants perpetuated their rule for generations. It is as if someone had gone to great lengths to securely fasten his possessions only to make it all the more convenient for a great thief to carry them away (Watson 1968: 107–108). In a clear reference to Confucian tenets, the “Rifling Trunks” says:

Fashion humaneness and righteousness to reform people and they will steal with humaneness and righteousness. How do I know this is so? He who steals a belt buckle pays with his life; he who steals a state gets to be a feudal lord—and we all know that humaneness and righteousness are to be found at the gates of the feudal lords. (Watson 1968: 110, changing “benevolence” to “humaneness”)

The suggestion mentioned above that Zhuangzi devoted himself to spiritual matters is vague, for there are different ways in which the text may be said to be about the “spiritual.” One reading, however, is that Zhuangzi was articulating a sense of spiritual freedom. This, in effect, is what Burton Watson means when he suggests that Zhuangzi’s message to the individual is to “free yourself from the world.” According to Watson:

The central theme of the *Zhuangzi* may be summed up in a single word: freedom. Essentially, all the philosophers of ancient China addressed themselves to the same problem: how is man to live in a world dominated by chaos, suffering, and absurdity? Nearly all of them

answered with some concrete plan of action designed to reform the individual, to reform society, and eventually to free the world from its ills. The proposals put forward by the Confucians, the Mohists, and the Legalists.... all seek for concrete social, political, and ethical reforms to solve it. Zhuangzi's answer, however....is grounded upon a wholly different type of thinking. It is the answer of a mystic, and in attempting to describe it here in clear and concrete language, I shall undoubtedly be doing violence to its essentially mystic and indescribable nature. Zhuangzi's answer to the question is: free yourself from the world (Watson 1968: 3).

This idea of freeing oneself from the world is understandable in the light of Zhuangzi's possibly having experienced the treacherous political events that led to the dissolution of his home state, and therefore his being skeptical of moral, social and political values and ideals. It means, in other words, a complete withdrawal from the affairs of the world. But Watson's statement that "The central theme of the *Zhuangzi* may be summed up in a single word: freedom," is intriguing. Quite apart from spiritual withdrawal, it raises the possibility that there may be values and ideals related to freedom to be drawn from the text. This possibility, however, is obscured by Watson's description of Zhuangzi as a "mystic" and his thinking as being essentially mystical and indescribable in nature.

The question arises, therefore: Is there a philosophical resource in the *Zhuangzi* from which social and political values and ideals can be drawn? We can work toward an answer by first noting something highly characteristic of the literary style of the *Zhuangzi*, namely, that it contains both a subversive and liberating strategy. In terms of this, it often targets the Confucians of his time. The figure of Confucius is often used, for example, to voice a position contrary to the orthodox Confucian views (Lin 1989). According to the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian, Zhuangzi excoriated (*piao bo* 剽剝) the Confucians and Mohists by using "veiled references and analogies (*zhi shi lei qing* 指事類情)" (Sima Qian 1982: 2143–44). Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* does not use straightforward propositional language and argument. Instead, stories, allegories, parables, parodies, fictitious figures and figurative images, and so on, are employed to undermine deep-seated points of view. The concept of *wu hua* (物化) or "the transformation of things" is both a good example and a central part of Zhuangzi's liberating strategy. In the following discussion, I shall focus on the philosophy behind this concept and spell out how, in conjunction with other concepts and stories in the *Zhuangzi*, we may draw from it some social and political implications.

### 3 The Transformation of Things

The term *hua* (化) occurs in the initial passage of the *Zhuangzi* about the fish transforming into a bird. The first thing to note about the concept of *wu hua* or the transformation of things is that it is used in a special way in the *Zhuangzi*. Here, *hua* is not necessarily equivalent to another term, *bian* (變) or "change." In other texts of



the early-mid Warring States (such as the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Laozi* or *Dao De Jing*), *bian* and *hua* were used either interchangeably or jointly (*bianhua*) to refer, say, to changes of facial expression, will, customs, dynasty, moral transformation, and so on (Sato 2005). The Confucians used *hua*, especially, in terms of moral transformation. In the *Mencius*, for instance, we find the following statements. “A noble person transforms where he is passing through, and works wonders where he abides” (Lau 2003: 7A13). “A noble person teaches in five ways. The first is by a transforming influence like that of timely rain” (Lau 2003: 7A40).<sup>7</sup>

In the *Zhuangzi*, a mid-late Warring States text, *hua* and *wu hua* have a more special reference, as distinct from moral transformation and other changes such as those just mentioned. Here, both *hua* and *wu hua* become subjects of discussion in their own right (Sato 2005). Indeed, we may say that they amount to technical terms that convey much more than the ordinary notion of change as we shall see from the discussion below.

The concept of the transformation of things is mentioned at the end of the well-known butterfly dream passage (Watson 1968: 49). During the dream, there is no awareness of an “original” self as Zhou (Zhuangzi’s personal name). When Zhou awakes, however, he is conscious of himself as Zhou. But at *this* moment is it the butterfly that is dreaming of being Zhou? This possibility would erase any distinction of identity. Zhuangzi concludes, “This is called the transformation of things.” In other words, this concept calls into question the ordinary consciousness of a distinct self-identity. Both for convenience and to distinguish this concept from other ordinary senses of change, I shall designate it as “TOT” in the discussion below.<sup>8</sup>

In another passage, a character named Mengsun Cai does not appear to grieve when his mother has died. Confucius explains that Mengsun does not know whether life or death should be preferred. He simply awaits transformation without knowing what he may be transformed into. In fact, we may have already transformed without being aware of it. Furthermore:

How would I know that what I call ‘I’ is not I? You dream you are a bird soaring in the sky, you dream you are a fish diving in the pool. Is the present person who speaks the one who is awake or the one dreaming? (Chen 1999: 210, my translation. Compare Watson 1968: 88)

Here, it is said that we are in the process of continuous transformation without being aware of it and hence the so-called “I” may be illusory. Also, transformation is utterly contingent: one could be transformed into anything. This is explicitly stated when Ziyu, asked if he resents the contorted shape of his body (a result of illness),

<sup>7</sup>The four other ways are: helping the individual to realize the potential of his/her virtue, developing his/her talent, clarifying his/her questions or doubts, and setting an example to be emulated. I have changed Lau’s “gentleman” to “noble person” (*junzi* 君子).

<sup>8</sup>In earlier work, I made a distinction between “transformation of identity” and “transformation of natural process” (Chong 2016: 51). In the present discussion, TOT replaces the former and I shall expand on the concept below.

replies that there is nothing to resent and the “maker of things” may transform his bodily parts into a rooster, a crossbow pellet, or a cartwheel (Watson 1968: 84).

Thus, according to the TOT, we are continuously transforming, we may be transformed into any other thing, and there is no distinct self-identity. These in turn evoke the idea of the oneness of things, as expressed for example by the four friends who state the basis of their friendship: “He who knows death and life, existence and non-existence are one—he will be my friend” (Chen 1999: 200, my translation. Compare Watson 1968: 84). On the surface, this idea of oneness provides for spiritual comfort in the face of suffering and death.

The theory of *qi* (氣) provides an explanation of transformation and oneness on a cosmological level. Under this theory, “The ten thousand things are really one,” and as such, reality consists of “the one breath (*qi*) that is the world” (Watson 1968: 236). In other words, *qi* is the reductive substance, the one stuff that everything in the universe is made of and which accounts for transformation. Brook Ziporyn has put it quite well:

Cosmologically, it comes to be regarded as the substance of which all things are composed, which is by nature biphasic, tending to expand into impalpable vapor and condense into palpable objects, spanning both the material and the spiritual; this is a meaning often encountered in the later parts of the *Zhuangzi*. It has no fixed form and is composed of no fundamental building blocks such as atoms or particles; rather, it is constantly in a process of transformation. (Ziporyn 2009: 216)

A question arises, however, about how to understand transformation or *hua* as Zhuangzi uses it. According to our ordinary understanding, for instance, what transforms into a butterfly is a pupa, not a human being. To take another example, the baby Tom gradually grows to be an adult but he does not change into another person named Jerry (unless he has changed his name), or for that matter, he does not transform into a rooster or a cartwheel. The Confucian Xunzi seems to have had Zhuangzi in mind when he said, “There are things with the same form but in different locations, and there are things with different forms but in the same location—these should be distinguished...Something which is transformed but in reality the same: call this one factual entity” (Li 1994: 516, my translation). For example, two horses of the same species and form situated in different places are two different entities. A foal that gradually grows into a stallion, on the other hand, has changed its form but not its location. Both the foal and stallion are “one factual entity” (*yi shi* 一實). Xunzi argues that the term *hua* (transform, transformation), should properly be applied only to cases such as the latter.

It is therefore pertinent to ask: Under the account of *qi* as “the substance of which all things are composed,” is Zhuangzi’s concept of the TOT governed by regular principles or laws? Are there no empirical constraints to this idea of transformation? In fact, some examples of transformation in the *Zhuangzi* are consistent with empirical constraints. For instance, when describing his wife’s life and death as the transformations of *qi*, Zhuangzi likens it to “the progression of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, winter” (Watson 1968: 192). In other words, there is regularity pertaining to life and death. In the text, life and death are often referred to as a “constant” (*chang* 常). In contrast, and from the ordinary perspective, there is a seeming

absurdity in Zhuangzi's account of transformation as described earlier, such as the possibility of Ziyu's bodily parts transforming into disparate things. In this account there are no constraints since something can be transformed into any other thing whatsoever. In other words, the TOT is not governed by known empirical laws or any regular order of things. What accounts for this? One way to understand this lies in what I have called Zhuangzi's "liberating strategy."

Other than providing spiritual comfort by stating that life and death and everything in the universe are "one," Zhuangzi is using the concept of transformation in another, more liberating way. This can be seen in how the term *qi* is used, especially in the Inner Chapters. In this usage, he is not concerned with the description of transformations in the ordinary empirical sense. Instead, he wants to dispel the reader of the belief in any inherent order of things, especially with regard to the realm of the social and political.

In the Inner Chapters, *qi* prominently refers to mists and clouds upon which some creatures and characters are said to ride and wander (*you yun qi* 遊雲氣). These connote a sense of liberation from conventional social bounds. As we have seen, the opening passage of the *Zhuangzi* provides a highly liberating image of a fish (Kun) transforming into the immeasurably huge bird (Peng) which "rises above the clouds and mists" and sets off for the Lake of Heaven (Chen 1999: 14; Watson 1968: 29). Other figures, too, are described as riding the wind or the clouds and mists, wandering without bounds or "beyond the four seas" (Chen 1999: 17, 25, 88). In reply to a complaint about the behavior of some characters at a funeral as inappropriate and against ritual norms, Confucius describes them as "wandering beyond the bounds" and himself as "wandering within the bounds" (Chen 1999: 204). These descriptions connote rising above and going beyond the boundaries and constraints of a particular state of mind or being.

Quite evidently, in the Inner Chapters, *qi* is not used in the context of transformations of natural processes in the ordinary empirical sense, with their constraints of identity, regularity and order. Instead, the TOT is also a figurative image which is used to undermine any assumption that the universe has any overarching order, including the belief that there are inherent standards of how things should be or how humans should behave. Zhuangzi says, for instance, "A road (*dao* 道) is established when walked on, things are thus when named" (Chen 1999: 68. Compare Watson 1968: 40). The term *dao* is used here in its original sense of a road or path. But at the same time, it means the *way* that people should behave, the ideal way of life, the norms that should govern society, and so on. Zhuangzi is saying implicitly (contrary to the Confucians and Mohists) that there is no one way, no set of absolute standards and norms, and that on the contrary, there can be more than one conception of the good life.

As such, we may appreciate Zhuangzi's use of *qi* as clouds and mists upon which some figures ride and wander (*you* 遊). This use is in fact continuous with the dream analogies. To begin with, clouds and mists have no inherent form, shape and order. They are constantly transforming, fluid, coming and going out of existence. The shifting clouds and mists also connote differences and changes of perspectives. The passage describing the flight of the bird Peng mentions "Wild horses (*ye ma* 野馬),

bits of dust, living things blowing each other about” (Chen 1999: 6). The term *ye ma*, “wild horses,” refers here to clouds which have transformed into the shape of galloping wild horses. This image is highly suggestive of a free and unconstrained state. Other associations may also come to mind. For instance, the notion of dance, spontaneity, and a care-free state. Together, they connote a sense of ease, freedom and liberation from the hierarchical norms and constraints of Confucian ritual principles. All these associations are encapsulated in the term *you* or “wandering” which is central to the *Zhuangzi*. This would also include freedom from mental states such as the anxieties of the debating Confucians and Mohists, for example. *Zhuangzi* describes them as having heart-minds that are constantly in tension and strife, in contrast to the sounds of the forest which arise and cease naturally with the wind (Watson 1968: 36–38).

Thus, although TOT or the “transformation of things” can serve as a euphemism for the process of life and death and provide spiritual comfort, the stories and images used by *Zhuangzi* in the Inner Chapters may be said to have wider, liberating social and political associations.

## 4 Social and Political Implications

The concept of the TOT in the *Zhuangzi*, despite its liberating images, at the same time highlights all the possible changes that anyone undergoes—life and death, fortune and misfortune, joy and sadness, health and sickness, and so on. All human beings are equally vulnerable to these vicissitudes. In chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*, for example, we find stories of friends who calmly share a mutual understanding of the TOT. The somewhat exaggerated and cartoonish descriptions of the physical deformities of some of the characters are apt to make us forget their physical suffering and plight. Nevertheless, we still get a glimpse of their pain and mutual care. In the final passage of this chapter, for example, Ziyu worries about Zisang who is evidently extremely ill. It has been raining incessantly and he has not seen his friend for ten days. He wraps some rice and visits. On arrival, he hears Zisang (apparently alone) simultaneously crying and singing about what has brought him to his present extremity and that it “must be *ming*” (Chen 1999: 219–20, Watson 1968: 91). Reading this, one would likely be moved to recognize that we are all equally vulnerable. This is also evidenced by the many references in the text to the notion of *ming* (命, often translated as “fate”) which is an acknowledgement of the sheer contingencies of life over which we have no control. This acknowledgment is a part of the TOT.

The references to *ming* together with a sense of “oneness” incorporate a common humanity. This is a sense of the vicissitudes of fortune and an awareness that one is just as vulnerable as others. This sense strips away all civil distinctions. It reinforces the idea that everyone is basically equal (Nussbaum 2003). This value of equality or, more exactly, egalitarianism, is expressed in the following story, for instance. The Prime Minister Zichan and the crippled Shentu Jia are both attending a class of a

particular Master. Zichan is extremely annoyed with his lowly classmate for sitting on the same mat and leaving at the same time. In exasperation, he tells Shentu Jia, "If I go out first, you stay behind, and if you go out first, I'll stay behind....When you see a prime minister, you don't even go out of the way—do you think you're the equal of a prime minister?" (Watson 1968: 70). As Zichan sees it, Shentu Jia is a "nobody"—someone without any social status—who behaves as if they are equals. However, the latter replies, "Within the gates of the Master, is there any such thing as a prime minister?" He also reminds Zichan that they are both disciples of a Master who has taught them to wander "outside the realm of forms and bodies" (Watson 1968: 71).

The specification of the context of attending a class is important. It is not as if there can be no social distinctions whatsoever. But Zichan's attitude is such that he takes the social distinctions and separate identities to apply even when they are fellow students. Shentu Jia, on the other hand, has absorbed the perspective of heaven or the TOT under which there is essentially no distinction between persons *per se*. Under this perspective, hierarchical norms and identities are artificially contrived and have no validity.

We should note that Zhuangzi's choice of Zichan in this story is not arbitrary. Zichan was a Prime Minister of the state of Zheng during the Spring and Autumn period whom Confucius admired for both his policies and personal qualities (Ziporyn 2009: 34). According to another account, both Zichan and Guanzhong (another minister admired by Confucius) "maintained the significance of *li* or the Rites as objective regulatory principle which should be followed in government; however, they initiated the concept of *fa* or law as another objective model, being equally important as *li*, which must be followed by the ruler" (Chang and Feng 1998: 13). In choosing to depict Zichan—a prominent political figure known to have been admired by Confucius—in the above story, Zhuangzi is parodying the hierarchical ritual distinctions and the social and political identities upheld by the Confucians.

In a similar vein, there is the equality alluded to by the story of Duke Ai of Lu when he no longer sees his relationship with Confucius in terms of their separate roles and status. In their conversation, Confucius explains the calm and harmonious attitude of *de* 德 which has no regulated form and in which one is able to be "spring with everything" (*yu wu wei chun* 與物為春). Duke Ai takes this as indicating that Confucius is "perfect" and therefore now regards their relationship as "friends in *de*" instead of "ruler and minister" (Chen 1999: 166; Watson 1968: 74). The references to friends here and elsewhere (such as those mentioned earlier who share a mutual understanding of TOT) are significant and not incidental. Shentu Jia, too, says that "The Master and I have been friends for nineteen years and he's never once let on that he's aware I'm missing a foot" (Watson 1968: 71). Friends, as Zhuangzi sees it, are equals without a sense of hierarchy between them.

The *de* mentioned above is a virtue in the sense of a particular "power" instead of "moral virtue." The individuals with this power have a calm and harmonious attitude toward life and possess a personal charisma, notwithstanding their physical deformities. This is described in terms of the metaphor of still water—calm and at

rest, reflecting and “stilling” things as they come. These individuals regard transformations as *ming* and in terms of their manifestation of oneness. In other words, they have the perspective of the TOT that does not dwell on distinctions between things and persons. Whatever transpires is a matter of transformation within this sense of oneness. Instead of lamenting life’s contingencies, they are able to “make it be spring with everything” as mentioned earlier. The *de* of the TOT therefore contrasts with Confucian *de* or moral virtue, in which one is expected to behave in accordance with the norms of ritual propriety.

Quite apart from the TOT, other stories in the *Zhuangzi*, too, have the effect of liberating the mind and opening up the imagination. Although there is an epistemic lesson here, it is not concerned merely about that. An important aspect of Zhuangzi’s philosophy is that it calls for the recognition of different, plural perspectives on what constitutes the good life instead of imposing one conception of it on all—no matter how well intended. The following are some stories that make this point.

In the story of Hundun, the well-meaning Shu and Hu wanted to repay Hundun’s kindness by boring seven apertures so that he, too, could see, hear, eat and breathe like them. But this killed off Hundun (Watson 1968: 97). And in the dialogue between Nie Que and Wang Ni, the former asks, “Do you know what all things agree in calling right?” Wang Ni gives various examples of the different habits and values of creatures and human beings, ending with the comment, “The way I see it, the rules of humaneness and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong are all hopelessly snarled and jumbled. How could I know anything about such discriminations?” (Watson 1968: 45–46, changing “benevolence” to “humaneness”). Ironically, these rules are described as “snarled and jumbled” when in fact they impose one set of values upon things. Another story worth mentioning is the following.

Once a sea bird alighted in the suburbs of the Lu capital. The marquis of Lu escorted it to the ancestral temple, where he entertained it, performing the Nine Shao music for it to listen to and presenting it with the meat of the Tai-lao sacrifice to feast on. But the bird only looked dazed and forlorn, refusing to eat a single slice of meat or drink a cup of wine, and in three days it was dead. This is to try to nourish a bird with what would nourish you instead of what would nourish a bird...Therefore the former sages never required the same ability from all creatures or made them all do the same thing. (Watson 1968: 194–95)

The above stories are in fact allegories which impart the lesson that we should not impose what we think constitute “the good life” onto others, no matter how well-intended. There are plural conceptions of the good life with their own values, commitments, and ways of living.<sup>9</sup> These are all different manifestations of oneness. Implicit in Zhuangzi’s criticism of Confucianism is that it imposes a monistic view of morality and a social and political system with little or no recognition for plural conceptions of the good life. Such a monistic imposition violates the natural *dao* since it does not acknowledge the varied and diverse manifestations of *dao*.

Zhuangzi does not advocate any conception of human nature in the Inner Chapters and accordingly he does not attribute any essence to human beings. In

<sup>9</sup>Yong Huang (2010) discusses the same examples and says that the *Zhuangzi* is putting the case for a virtue ethics of respect for diverse ways of life.



contrast to Mencius (see Lau 2003: 6A6), he does not mention the term *qing* 情 in terms of any human “genuineness” or essence. Instead, it is mentioned in terms of socially constructed *facts* that shape human attitudes, suggesting the possibility of being free from some of these attitudes and the institutions that have given rise to them (Chong 2016: 133). For Zhuangzi, there are no constant patterns, principles or laws that lay out how human society must be ordered or governed. As we have seen, the TOT expresses the liberating idea that there need not be any specific order to things. In fact, Zhuangzi would go beyond the human to extend a regard for non-human creatures, animals and plants. For him, the world is not human-centered.

This non-essentialism is a central implication of the TOT and its notion of oneness. As we have seen, if something may be transformed into any other thing, this means that there is no self-identity and furthermore, no underlying essence to anything. In this regard, TOT is not just a figurative image or a comforting thought. In terms of the processes of *qi*, it is at base a metaphysical thesis about the underlying reality of the oneness of things.<sup>10</sup> A philosophical implication of this thesis is that there is no “thing” *per se* since everything is in the process of continuous transformation.

So far, we have drawn from the *Zhuangzi* the following implied values and ideals: a sense of common humanity and fundamental equality of persons; recognition of the plurality of values and commitments; and different conceptions of the good life. Some cautionary remarks are in order about what is being attributed to the text. The claim is not that, given the values just mentioned, it would espouse a “democratic” or “liberal democratic” system of government.<sup>11</sup> Such attributions would also be utterly anachronistic since these are contemporary concepts of representative government that involve the institutionalization of individual civil and political rights (which themselves have a history in European political thought going back to the seventeenth century).<sup>12</sup> However, although these are “Western” concepts, the sense of a common humanity, basic equality, recognition of different values and conceptions of the good are not exclusive to the West, nor are they exclusively contemporary ideas.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the philosopher of science John Dupré tells us that from the genetic point of view there are no sharp boundaries between species. Furthermore, “If there are no sharp boundaries, then there are certainly no essences that define such boundaries” (Dupré 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Kwek has similarly cautioned against “turning the *Zhuangzi*’s critique of proto-imperial logics into affirmations of *laissez-faire* liberalism, or libertarianism” (Kwek 2019: 428).

<sup>12</sup> John Mearsheimer notes the roots of liberalism in the Enlightenment which valorized the individual, held the moral legitimacy of self-interest, had confidence in the power of reason and in the power to manipulate things for the good of mankind. (Mearsheimer 2018: 57). Overall, he provides a trenchant analysis and critique of the underlying tenets of liberalism both as a political philosophy and American foreign policy.

<sup>13</sup> Commenting on a description of the ancient Indian writer Kautilya as “the Indian Machiavelli,” Amartya Sen says, “...it is amusing that an Indian political analyst from the fourth century BC has to be introduced as a local version of an European writer born in the fifteenth century. What this reflects is not, of course, any kind of crude assertion of a geographical pecking order, but simply the lack of familiarity with non-Western literature of Western intellectuals (and in fact intellectuals



I have posed the above social and political implications of the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* against the Confucians because Zhuangzi himself targets them, or more exactly, the Confucians and the associated social and political institutions of his time. He apparently thought that the values, ideals and institutions which they upheld were too hierarchical and unduly restrictive. However, contemporary writers on Confucianism remind us that there may be resources within the philosophy of Confucianism for pluralism and tolerance of diversity. The notion of a “common good,” for instance, is open to interpretation and Confucians can recognize that the best way to pursue it is to allow for tolerance of plural ways of looking at what the common good consists of, and of different paths toward it (Wong 2004). But if Confucians still insist on some essentialist view of the human being, this may not go far enough to allow for proper respect for plural values, especially when such a view happens to be in the interests of a dominant group. Thus, it may be appreciated how Zhuangzi’s non-essentialist philosophy deepens his pluralist position.

If we want to look for the grounding for values of respect for equality and diversity within the Chinese tradition, there is as good (if not better) reason to mention the *Zhuangzi* than Confucianism. However, the text does not espouse or attach itself to any social and political system. If we wish to make use of Zhuangzi’s philosophy to espouse a particular system, it should be clear that it is *we*, in the present, and not Zhuangzi, who argue about how these values can be best realized. (I shall discuss this further, in the Conclusion). Similarly, I do not wish to deny that Confucianism can somehow accommodate these values, as has been argued by some writers. This would, however, involve a reinvention of Confucianism in contemporary terms such that it is made to constitutionally recognize plural forms of life. As Sungmoon Kim has argued, “we can reinvent Confucian democracy from an ethically monistic or thick communitarianism into a pluralist political practice that is nevertheless devoted to the common good” in terms of a constitutional unity instead of moral unity; pluralizing Confucian virtues into moral and civic virtues; and recognizing the constitutional rights of minorities to contest public norms in civil society (Kim 2014: 113).

We should note, however, some disagreement among contemporary advocates of Confucianism. Kim disagrees with Joseph Chan, for instance, whom he says “understands Confucianism as a theory of ethical perfectionism (monist ethics in other words)” (Kim 2014: 113; Chan 2013). In any case, there is in general too ready a tendency to conflate the Chinese tradition with Confucianism. Most writers on diversity in the Chinese context have ignored the *Zhuangzi* (at least, so far as I am aware, this seems to have been the case with writings in English). David Wong, though, has called for “a greater synthesis of Confucianism and Daoism, and more specifically, Zhuangzi’s appreciation for difference and the multiplicity of perspectives” (Wong 2004: 46).

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all across the modern world because of the global dominance of Western education today)” (Sen 2009: xiv).

Another objection that contemporary defenders of Confucianism might put forward is that it is misconceived to think that hierarchy is an inherent value for the Confucians, as if it is something written in the nature of things such that people cannot move up the social ladder. On the contrary, Confucius, for instance, believed that there are no distinctions between people who wanted to learn, and was happy to teach anyone eager to do so. The reply of Mencius to King Xuan of Qi's question, "Is regicide permissible" is also likely to be cited. Mencius said that he would not refer to the killing of a cruel and tyrannical king as "regicide" (Lau 2003: 1B8). Indeed, in the history of imperial China, the moral strictures of Confucianism have sometimes been regarded as subversive. For instance, the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋), ordered the censorship of certain passages of the *Mencius* (such as 7B14, which states the supreme importance of the people over the ruler) and only allowed an official redacted copy of the text for the general public.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, Confucian prescriptions of humaneness and righteousness (*renyi* 仁義) are inadequate to philosophically ground a social and political system that gives recognition to diversity and equality. At least, not without some contemporary "reinvention" as mentioned above. Even if we grant that, for the Confucians, hierarchy does not mean a rigid social stratum, there is still a stress on hierarchical ritual distinctions for the maintenance of social order. The reality is that there is a tendency for the elite ruling classes to protect their power and interests and, as such, moving up the social scale would be much more difficult than the Confucian tenet of teaching without discrimination, or its moral strictures, might lead us to think. This worry is part of the moral skepticism expressed in some parts of the *Zhuangzi*, as we have seen.

Finally, apart from equality and diversity, we need to state more precisely the sense in which "freedom" is a value in the *Zhuangzi*. In the beginning of this chapter we noted that throughout the text there are descriptions of individuals who spurn political office and power and that this manifested a self-preservationist strand in the text. However, there are also other aspects to some of these stories that should not be ignored. We mentioned, for example, the story of Zhuangzi declining an invitation to take office. He tells the two emissaries:

I have heard that there is a sacred tortoise in (the state of) Chu that has been dead for three thousand years. The king keeps it wrapped in cloth and boxed, and stores it in the ancestral temple. Now would this tortoise rather be dead and have its bones left behind and honored? Or would it rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud?" The officials choose the latter. Zhuangzi then says: "Go away! I'll drag my tail in the mud!" (Watson 1968: 187–88)

This tells us something about Zhuangzi's attitude toward social and political authority. In the story, the value of individual freedom is upheld against the constraints of the rites. We can also say that Zhuangzi values his personal integrity. This is part of what it means to maintain one's "true" character as indicated in the *Zhuangzi's* idea

<sup>14</sup>As mentioned in the general Humanities reader compiled by faculty of Fudan University, Shanghai, Yitiao Ketang 一條課堂 (2019: 80–81).

of being “true” (*zhen* 真) and the “true person” (*zhen ren* 真人, see Chong 2011a, 2016). I have mentioned “personal” and not “moral” integrity. The former is consistent with personal beliefs about what constitute the individual’s highest commitments and ideals, which need not be uniform with some dominant conception of morality. The many “irregular,” “deformed,” and even ugly characters described in the *Zhuangzi* who have charismatic power of *de* and who “wander beyond the bounds” can be seen as intimating the values of non-conformity, individual expression, character and development.

Isaiah Berlin has famously distinguished between two conceptions of freedom or liberty—negative and positive (Berlin 1969). Negative liberty is the relative freedom from constraints to action, or from the interference of others in one’s actual and potential actions. The fewer constraints and interference, the more freedom one can be said to have. Positive liberty, on the other hand, involves independent mastery and control over one’s life in terms of what is thought to be true or authentic about the self. Both conceptions of liberty assume freedom of choice, but negative liberty does not assume any theory of the authentic self as having mastery and control. For historical, social and political reasons, there has been a tendency for positive liberty to be developed in terms of what the “true” or “authentic” self is, as inculcated by various ideologies—a moral self, a self that is submissive to God, a self that is defined by the national will and the common good, and so on. Under these terms, however, positive liberty can lead to encumbrances upon individual freedom as understood in the negative sense.

Insofar as Confucianism stipulates a conception of self that can only be fully developed in accordance with certain moral and ritual ideals, it can be said to have an underlying conception of positive liberty. On the other hand, we may take Zhuangzi’s call for freedom from Confucian constraints in the negative sense. This is compatible with the TOT’s denial of a distinct self-identity. It is also compatible with the concept of the *cheng xin* or the pre-established heart-mind, under which each of us is limited in our perspectives, given the inseparability of the cognitive and affective aspects of the heart-mind (Chong 2011b, 2016). Though we should strive to be open, we lack cognitive autonomy. As such, none of us can be said to have a privileged epistemic and value standpoint.

Here, we should mention a criticism of Zhuangzi by Tao Jiang, in a paper entitled “Isaiah Berlin’s Challenge to the Zhuangzian Freedom.” Jiang states that “Although Zhuangzi shares Berlin’s concern about moral monism and advocates moral pluralism, it is rather unfortunate that the Zhuangzian expressions of negative freedom are mainly confined to the spiritual domain and are not forcefully carried into the political discourse in reimagining new possibilities with regard to the state. It never happens (*sic*) to Zhuangzi that the state can be reconstituted in such a way that its ability to intrude upon people’s personal freedom can be kept in check” (Jiang 2012: 88). In fairness to Zhuangzi, I think this is something that can be said only in hindsight

and with contemporary views of political and institutional structures in mind.<sup>15</sup> And I have also argued that the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* is not just about spiritual freedom or the spiritual domain. Instead, it can provide the grounding for the social and political values mentioned above.

A related issue is that Jiang reads *hua* in the *Zhuangzi* as referring to self-transformation. This leads him to note that unlike Berlin who “theorizes from the perspective of an ordinary ‘natural’ person,” Zhuangzi and others in the Chinese tradition give primacy to self-cultivation and highlight people who “are often exemplars of unique virtues and paragons of special skills” (Jiang 2012: 85). Jiang argues that “To develop a Zhuangzian *imaginaire* of political freedom that safeguards an individual against the encroachment of others and the state, thinkers in the Chinese tradition need to think through the implications of such a world from the vantage point of an ordinary, average person. This requires a paradigm shift, away from the axiomatic premise of self-cultivation and epistemic superiority of a cultivated sage, an assumption that is shared by all traditional Chinese thinkers, including Zhuangzi” (Jiang 2012: 86). However, I have argued that *hua* and *wu hua* in the *Zhuangzi* are in the main technical terms which refer not to self-cultivation but to an underlying philosophy of the transformation of things in which there is no essence to things and persons.<sup>16</sup> As such, there is no distinction between persons. In this regard alone (though there are other aspects as well), Zhuangzi is radically different from other traditional thinkers such as the early Confucians. The dimensions of his philosophy, as I broadly intimated in the beginning of this chapter, travel far beyond the Confucian domain. Thus, I would not agree that, as Jiang says (see above), Zhuangzi shares with “all traditional Chinese thinkers” the “axiomatic premise of self-cultivation and epistemic superiority of a cultivated sage....” As I have stated above, Zhuangzi’s position is that no one has a privileged epistemic and value standpoint.<sup>17</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, let us return to Sima Qian’s observation that Zhuangzi made use of “veiled references and analogies” in criticizing the Confucians. This critique turns out to be not just negative in nature. In other words, Zhuangzi is not just a moral,

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<sup>15</sup>In his chapter contribution to the present volume, “Personal Freedom and the Good Life in the *Zhuangzi*,” Jiang has tempered his criticism somewhat by saying that “The lack of political imagination is clearly not the fault of the Zhuangists alone. Imagination is socially and culturally conditioned even as it tries to transcend such conditions. The limitation of the Zhuangist political *imaginaire* is in many ways the product of a lack of alternative forms of political systems and institutions in early China.” (See the second last note in his “Conclusion”).

<sup>16</sup>This is not to deny that in the *Zhuangzi* (especially in the Outer Chapters, see for instance Chaps. 15 and 19) there are discussions of self-cultivation. However, other terms (instead of *hua*) are used for this. Also, what self-cultivation means in the *Zhuangzi* is very different from the *Analects* and the *Mozi*, for instance. See Chong 2019 for a discussion.

<sup>17</sup>I have developed this in Chong 2022.

social and political skeptic with nothing positive to offer. His non-essentialist philosophy profoundly recognizes and grounds plural conceptions of the good life. On the surface, the concept of the transformation of things and the idea of oneness seem merely to provide spiritual comfort in the face of suffering and death. However, the philosophy of the transformation of things is a metaphysical thesis about their “oneness.” At the same time, the images of transformation in the *Zhuangzi* express liberation from the idea that there must be any specified order to things or that there is a unique sense of order, and this means that there is no one legitimate way to lead our lives. This is especially liberating when compared with Confucian norms and institutions of order that stipulate how people should behave in terms of their separate social identities and roles in hierarchical relationships.

Xunzi made the well-known remark that “Zhuangzi was blinded by heaven and did not know the human” (Li 1994: 478).<sup>18</sup> This can be read as stating that, unlike the Confucians and others, Zhuangzi did not prescribe any institutional solution to the disorder of his time or take part in any social and political program that would offer one. On the contrary, he was wary of, and stayed aloof from, institutional structures. But while acknowledging this, we need not agree that he had nothing (or nothing illuminating) to say about human affairs. His veiled references to social and political issues were, in themselves, a symptom of the disintegrating social order of his time. This disintegration would have led to questioning of the basis for traditional social relations and distinctions. The transformation of things, insofar as it expresses a non-essentialist philosophy, is one such radical questioning of the traditional order of things and provides a ground resource for the values of equality, pluralism, and individual freedom, expression and development. These were severely constrained by the institutions of Zhuangzi’s time and that is perhaps why, as Sima Qian says, his “words overflowed without restraint to suit himself” (Sima Qian 1982: 2143–44).

I mentioned that if we wish to attach the values (such as equality, diversity, freedom) found in the *Zhuangzi* to a particular social and political system of governance, it has to be clear that it is *we*—with contemporary ideas such as the philosophy of liberalism and the system of liberal democracy in mind—who are doing so, not Zhuangzi. Quite apart from the obvious fact that it is anachronistic to think that Zhuangzi supports liberalism or liberal democracy, there may be other reasons why we should not automatically associate him with these. Here, I can only briefly mention some considerations about his philosophy that would merit further discussion. First, a key assumption of liberalism is that individuals are autonomous in the sense of being able to rationally reflect and decide upon their life choices. There is reason to believe, however, that Zhuangzi doubts the rational autonomous nature of individual human beings (Chong 2011b, 2016). Second, despite his eschewing judgments of right and wrong, or good and bad, he does seem to have at least one overarching concern, namely, the harm that humans have wrought on nature and

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<sup>18</sup> John Knoblock’s translation is “Zhuang Zhou was blinded by Nature and was insensible to men” (Knoblock 1994: 21.4).

their general failure to live in harmony with it. This raises the possibility that he may prefer some overall conception of the good and of the ideal society. And this would have to be reconciled in some way with his pluralism. Third, liberal democracy as we know it today is closely associated with the market economy and capitalism. Among the characteristics of contemporary capitalist society are an unreflective consumerism and a uniform mass culture that celebrates wealth and fame. In the *Zhuangzi*, however, there is criticism of how people are influenced and even corrupted by desires engendered by material goods, wealth, social position, and fame.<sup>19</sup> This third point is related to the second. That is, given his criticism of these non-rational and unreflective desires, Zhuangzi may have an overall conception of the good that he prefers, and which he thinks would be more in conformity with nature. Quite apart from the reasons why it should not be assumed that the *Zhuangzi* would automatically align with liberalism and liberal democracy, questions have increasingly been raised in recent years about what liberalism means, what it entails, and even about the legitimacy of the liberal paradigm itself. As John Christman has put it, "Attention has moved from asking questions about political principles from *within* the framework of . . . the liberal paradigm to raising questions about the legitimacy of that paradigm itself" (Christman 2002: 4). In any case, the important point is that we should not unthinkingly assimilate Zhuangzi's philosophy to any contemporary system of governance and thought. Further discussion is required. In the end, though, I am inclined to think that Zhuangzi's pluralistic position would not be aligned with any particular system that believes in an objective solution to moral, social and political issues. In this regard, what Isaiah Berlin has said about the ultimate irreconcilability of certain values may be applicable:

The notion that there must exist final objective answers to normative questions, truths that can be demonstrated or directly intuited, that it is in principle possible to discover a harmonious pattern in which all values are reconciled, and that it is towards this unique goal that we must make; that we can uncover some single central principle that shapes this vision, a principle which, once found, will govern our lives—this ancient and almost universal belief, on which so much traditional thought and action and philosophical doctrine rests, seems to me invalid, and at times to have led (and still to lead) to absurdities in theory and barbarous consequences in practice. (Berlin 2017: 47–48)

Despite the above qualifications, there remains an undeniably strong, critical and independent spirit in the *Zhuangzi*. This is combined with a skepticism toward the realities of attaining power and how those in power tend to entrench themselves and others with whom they identify. These alone would suffice to make us doubt if Zhuangzi would have readily attached himself to any particular system. Allied to this critical spirit is a non-doctrinal aspect of his philosophy that recognizes the complexities of any social and political entity and the need for subtlety, flexibility

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<sup>19</sup> A passage in one of the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* goes so far as to disapprove the use of machines because their ingenuity leads to a heart-mind that is clever, opportunistic or calculating (*ji xin* 機心, see Chen 1999: 333). Watson translates this as having a "machine heart" (Watson 1968: 134).

and imagination in thinking about social and political issues. Some recent writers have drawn attention to this. As David Wong and Marion Hourdequin have stated, “The Zhuangian skeptical stance is not doctrinal. The intention is not to establish that we know nothing, but rather to open us to new possibilities of what might become new knowledge and insight, though discoveries are never immune to questioning in turn, especially when they calcify into received wisdom” (Wong and Hourdequin 2019: 21). Also, “Zhuangzi encourages encounters and exchange among diverse perspectives and values, embracing the interaction between and consideration of multiple rich perspectives” (Wong and Hourdequin 2019: 23. See also Connolly 2019: 56). In sum, we can say without exaggeration that there is a critical, independent and imaginative spirit in the *Zhuangzi* that may inspire thinking about social and political affairs.

We began by noting that, generally (and also traditionally), it has not been evidently thought that the *Zhuangzi* has anything to say about social and political issues, or that there are any social and political implications to be gleaned from it. It has to be admitted, though, that this has been said without reference to what contemporary intellectuals in China have thought about the *Zhuangzi* in discussions about social and political issues. Here, we should be aware of the need to take into account the influence of actual social, political and historical circumstances.<sup>20</sup> At least, however, my own discussion above of the philosophy of the transformation of things, and the papers I have cited in this chapter, together indicate a growing recognition of some of the social and political implications of the text. Instead of the exclusive attention paid to Confucianism, the recent literature in English indicates a greater awareness of the *Zhuangzi* as a rich and stimulating resource for the discussion of social and political issues.<sup>21</sup> Some may argue that the same can be said for Confucian and other non-Confucian texts such as the *Hanfeizi* (韓非子) and the *Mozi*, for instance, which are directly social and political tracts. But the *Zhuangzi* invites more subtle engagement with ethical, social and political issues despite not on the surface being about them, and despite its not propounding any system of governance. Undeniably, it has served as a source of spiritual freedom for many. But as I have said repeatedly, there is more to the *Zhuangzi* than (just) the expression of spiritual freedom.

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<sup>20</sup>For an account of the various responses of Chinese writers in the twentieth century to the *Zhuangzi*, see Liu 2016.

<sup>21</sup>In another instance of this recognition, Lincoln Rathnam states that “Zhuangzi has more to say about how to conduct oneself in public affairs than has often been recognized” (Rathnam 2019: 1091). But it is, perhaps, an overstatement to refer to Zhuangzi as a “political philosopher” in the title of his paper, “Wandering in the Ruler’s Cage: Zhuangzi as a Political Philosopher.”



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# Chapter 27

## Constructive Skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*



David B. Wong

### 1 Introduction

In this essay I further develop an interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 as an enactment of “constructive skepticism” (previously articulated in Wong 2005, 2009, 2017). This is not a declarative skepticism that makes a claim about the state of human knowledge or the lack of it, such as the claim that there is no knowledge or that nothing of importance can be known. It is a *stance* questioning claims made by others or by oneself to be in possession of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> By saying the text is an “enactment” of constructive skepticism, I mean that it interrogates claims to know and of the human pretense to knowledge in general, but that it does not deny we have any knowledge. This interrogation is constructive because is intended to get the audience to look in the world for what is not revealed in what it purportedly “knows.” Construing the *Zhuangzi*’s skepticism as constructive in this way helps to reconcile it with the positive claims about the nature of the world and how to live that are also made in the text.

I also will explain why I think constructive skepticism, on its own merits, is in fact a beneficial stance to take and why it is supported by much of what we have

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<sup>1</sup>The original term I used is “interrogative skepticism,” and is taken from Paul K. Moser’s distinction between interrogative and declarative skepticism, where the latter is a claim or thesis, e.g., the claim that we know nothing, except for this claim (see Moser 1999: 88; Wong 2005). I changed the name of the skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* to “constructive skepticism” to include the connotation of a purpose underlying the act of questioning: that of revealing or discovery more of what there is (see Wong 2017).

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learned scientifically about the processes and limitations of human knowledge-seeking. However, I also address the possible hazards in taking the *Zhuangzi* to be a text from which we can learn and bring into dialogue with some of our contemporary thinking. I study classical Chinese thought because I think I have much to learn from it regarding the problems that occupy me as a philosopher, yet I am aware of the dangers that such an approach brings, which involve reading into the text a relevance to my contemporary concerns and views that it might not have.

## 2 Making the Case for the Interpretation of Constructive Skepticism

One of the most intriguing features of the *Zhuangzi* is that it not only expresses skepticism about what we think we know but also positive views about the nature of the world or the way to live that can be plausibly attributed to Zhuangzi or to followers of Zhuangzi, as represented by the Inner (Chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) and Outer Chaps. (8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22). Of course, the text obviously contains many voices expressing a truly impressive variety of views. Some of them are presented as the objects of criticism or even mockery, but others seem to be presented in the tone of advocacy. Part of the task of interpreting the *Zhuangzi*, then, is to see how these two sides of the text fit together.

Here is where one danger arises for the sort of interpretation I am attempting to give. Philosophical interpretations of a text usually treat it either as a coherent whole or at least an attempted coherent whole, as if it were a single-authored text. This of course cannot be assumed of the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, the most reasonable view is that it comes to us as the aggregate of voices of many people and diverse schools of thought. Not even all parts of the Inner chapters (the first seven) are assured to reflect the single voice of the historical Zhuangzi (see Klein 2011). In attempting to weave together the skeptical and constructive sides (or at least one of those constructive sides) of the text, I am sensitive to the possibility that these sides embody different and perhaps incompatible voices. However, as I hope you will see, the skeptical side and the constructive side are often found not only very close together, even in the same sentence, but somehow interwoven in their meaning and logic. When they appear in long passages, those passages have a coherence in theme that invites the task of seeing how the two sides might fit together.

To see how this fitting together might be possible, let me first introduce the notion of constructive skepticism. It is a stance in the sense that it is an act of questioning rather than an act of assertion of something to be the case. The stance is enacted by asking how something that is claimed to be known is known, or doubting that there is sufficient warrant for what is claimed. The stance makes no general claim that nothing can be known. It is not a dogmatic assertion that aims to foreclose the quest for knowledge. In fact, the thrust of constructive skepticism is quite the opposite. Its effect is to get the audience to look again, to pay more attention or to consider more widely what is relevant to what it has previously thought it has known.

Though skepticism appears in many places of the text, it receives the most sustained, varied, and intricate expression in the second chapter, “Equalizing Assessments of Things” (*Qi Wu Lun* 齊物論). One intriguing, and extremely challenging, feature of the skepticism expressed there is that it seems intended to dent our confidence in our knowing anything of importance but also involves substantive claims about the nature of the world, about the self, about language and its relation to its users and the world. The opening reflection by Ziqi 子綦 is a case in point. He declares he has lost himself (吾喪我), says that he hears the piping (籟) of humanity but not yet the piping of the earth (地), has heard the piping of the earth, but not yet the piping of Heaven (*Tian* 天). The piping is conveyed through the image of the Great Clump (*Da Kuai* 大塊) blowing its vital breath (*qi* 氣), through the ten thousand hollows (2.3–2.5).<sup>2</sup> The wind through the hollows, when light, brings a *xiao he* 小和 (small harmony), and when powerful, a harmony that is vast and grand (*da he* 大和). In blowing through each of the ten thousand hollows, the piping of Heaven allows “each to go its own way” (咸其自取) (Ziporyn 2009: 9).

In contrast, the piping of humanity is characterized in combative terms. It is like arrows shot from a bowstring when we presume to pronounce on what is *shifei* 是非: (right and wrong, correct and incorrect, fitting and unfitting) (其發若機括, 其司是非之謂也) (2.6). This activity is simultaneously constricting and life-energizing for the combatants themselves, who are “[h]eld fast as if bound by cords,” continuing “along the same ruts,” the mind is left on the verge of death, and nothing can restore its vitality. (Ziporyn 2009: 10) (其厭也如緘, 以言其老洩也; 近死之心, 莫使復陽也). The piping of humanity is presented as in discord with the piping of the earth and of Heaven.

Joy and anger, sorrow and happiness, plans and regrets, transformations and stagnations, unguarded abandonment and deliberate posturing—music flowing out of hollows, mushrooms of billowing steam! Day and night they alternate before us, but no one knows whence they sprout. That is enough! That is (2:7) enough! Is it from all of this, presented ceaselessly day and night, that we come to exist? Without that there would be no me, to be sure, but then again without (2:8) me there would be nothing selected out from it all. (Ziporyn 2009: 10).

喜怒哀樂, 慮嘆變慙, 姚佚啟態; 樂出虛, 蒸成菌! 日夜相代乎前, 而莫知其所萌. 已乎 已乎! 旦暮得此, 其所由以生乎! 非彼無我, 非我無所取。

The *Zhuangzi* goes on to suggest that there must be some controller or true lord (真宰) behind all these goings-on, but it shows no form (而不見其形).

If we follow whatever has so far taken shape, fully formed, in our minds, making that our teacher, who could ever be without a teacher? The mind (2:12) comes to be what it is by taking possession of whatever it selects out of the process of alternation—but does that mean it has to truly understand that process? The fool takes something up from it too. But to claim that there are (2:13) any such things as “right” and “wrong” before they come to be fully formed in someone’s mind in this way—that is like saying you left for Yue today and arrived there yesterday. (Ziporyn 2009: 11)

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, I draw from the translation by Ziporyn (Ziporyn 2009). The section numbers are from Ziporyn’s translation. For the Chinese text, I have consulted the Chinese text at <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi>.

夫隨其成心而師之，誰獨且無師乎？奚必知代而心自取者有之？愚者與有焉。未成乎心而有是非，是今日適越而昔至也。

The language of “selecting” (*qu* 取) out of the process of alternation, and the ridicule of the idea that there are such things as “right” and “wrong” before they come to be fully formed in the mind through a process that one may not truly understand, suggests that the piping of human beings is formed on the basis of selecting from some of the piping of Heaven and earth. Our very conceptions of “right” and “wrong” are products of this process of selection:

Something is affirmative because someone affirms it. Something is negative because someone negates it. Courses [daos 道, guiding discourses] are formed [cheng 成] by someone walking them. Things so by being called so. Whence thus and so? From thus and so being affirmed of them. Whence not thus and so? From thus and so being negated of them. (Ziporyn 2009: 13, 2.19)

可乎可，不可乎不可。道行之而成，物謂之而然。惡乎然？然於然。惡乎不然？不然於不然。

What are we to make of the claim that “Things are so by being called so”? There is no implication that the world itself is a product of our selections, but rather, as I read this passage, that the very oppositions between “right” and “wrong” and “thus and so” and “not thus and so” only emerge within the subjective worlds we have fashioned from our selections, from our conceptualizations of things with certain identity conditions that differentiate them from other things and from their environment.

Compare the view in the *Qi Wu Lun* passage with a view articulated by contemporary philosophers such as Nelson Goodman and my late colleague Iris Einheuser (Goodman 1978; Einheuser 2011). On this view, facts such as what things are in the world and the properties they possess are not there independently of how we conceptualize them. We carve out facts from the stream of goings-on in our environment. An independent world is responsible for this stream, and we systematize and structure it, using only a very small portion of what we could glean from that stream to make sense of and navigate through that world.

That we must filter out most of what we receive through our senses is necessitated by the limitations of our cognitive equipment. Recent neuroscientific studies suggest that the mechanism for filtering out consists in suppressing conscious awareness of information that seems irrelevant to what we are currently focusing on in the environment. An ancient region of the brain that we share with fish, the basal ganglia, plays a key role in suppressing sensory signals before they reach the prefrontal cortex, the region of the brain performing the complex cognitive functions of planning, prediction and conscious control of behavior (Nakajima et al. 2019). This is how we can hear other people at our table in a noisy restaurant. But the necessity for selectivity is also a reason why our conceptualizations of the world end up being quite partial in the sensory information that we make sense of, and why there are always alternative conceptualizations that make sense of information we are currently suppressing.

The world independent of us does constrain the range of viable conceptualizations. Metaphors for this process of selection that creates things and facts about

them include sculpting a statue out of marble or naming a particular constellation such as the Big Dipper through discerning a certain pattern of stars in the sky. The process of selection cannot produce just any range of facts, just as one cannot make any pattern given the location of stars in the sky. The constraints come from the nature of the input from the world, the features of our sensory and cognitive apparatus, and the nature of the interaction between the two. It is just that the constraints do not determine a single correct systematization.

Notice, however, that this characterization of how we select things and facts presupposes certain claims—e.g., that our conceptualizations do not simply try to capture pre-existing facts but in fact partially constitute them. Moreover, the characterization of human piping is set within a framework that asserts the overall unity and harmony of Heaven and earth: the Great Clump blowing its breath through the ten thousand hollows. Constructive skepticism and substantial assertion about the world and how we relate to it do not just sit side by side in this haunting imagery, but are intertwined. Indeed, if we are persuaded by this passage to doubt the unique adequacy of any set of “selections” forming our conceptualizations of the world, we do so on the basis of thinking it quite plausible that we make a limited set of “selections” from the rich input the world provides us, and that in doing so we leave out or distort much that could potentially be learned. In some of my discussion below, I shall point out the ways that our best science supports such a basis for continuing doubt about the adequacy of not only our best science, but of any way we have of understanding the world.

Thus, not only is constructive skepticism compatible with the view about conceptualization going into facts of the world, but also more substantive claims about the nature of the world as a whole consisting in interdependent, fluidly interacting things that are never permanent but flow into and become each other. Their emergence from and return to a greater whole is a unity, though the nature of that unity remains fundamentally mysterious to us. Indeed, the complexity and fluid plasticity of things is part of what makes the range of alternative conceptualizations of the world significant and wide. The significance of the content of this way of all being “One,” in some sense, is it carries with it the expectation that it will be elusive.

To be sure, some passages in the “Equalizing Assessments of Things” chapter seem to be skeptical in a more ordinary way by calling our attention to the human inability to resolve arguments. “Suppose you and I get into a debate,” it is said at one point (2.43), and “If I win and you lose, does that really mean that I’m right and you’re wrong?” (Ziporyn 2009: 19). Of course we must answer in the negative, and that is why in the course of exploring the possibilities for determining who is right and who is wrong, the possibility of bringing a third party onto the scene is raised, but whatever that person’s view turns out to be—agreeing with me, agreeing with you, agreeing or disagreeing with both of us—we may still question how this person can straighten us out, for in the end all that the other can do is to put into play another point of view the superiority of which remains to be established through instruments that are splendidly fitted for persuasion but not necessarily what is really right.



Moreover, the variation in meanings of words often results in our talking past each other, as is the case with the Mohists and the Confucians. Each affirms what the other negates, and negates what the other affirms (以是其所非, 而非其所是). Though speech is not just the blowing of air because it has meanings, these meanings are peculiarly unsettled (特未定). The Mohists and Confucians may be talking past each other because the meanings of the words they use are not uniform between them, even though there is enough overlap in meaning so that they take one another to be affirming, *shi*-ing, what the other is negating, *fei* -ing. Their selections from the alternation do not coincide enough for resolution of their debate. The reference to the Confucians and Mohists ends with “But if you want to affirm what they negate and negate what they affirm, (2:15) nothing compares with using the light (*yi ming* 以明).”<sup>3</sup>

Though the standoff between the Confucians and Mohists could have the relatively simple skeptical point that each side’s positions rest on fundamental views for which they can give no reason compelling the other side’s assent, it also fits well with the deeper point that our conceptualizations profoundly shape how we see the world and understand its input. When different sides have alternative conceptualizations, and when they all are within the range of how the world constrains us, then they will indeed end up with different meanings or standards for applying crucial terms such as *shi/fei*. Mohists, for example, will see the human world and what is important to human beings in terms of benefit and harm (*li/hai* 利害), while Confucians will recognize among the fundamental human goods the comity of deference and yielding achieved through ritual (*li rang* 禮讓).

Again, we have good reasons to call into question our claims to knowledge, but these reasons are themselves based on a view of the world and of our tenuous grasp of it. If we believe these reasons we may well refrain from saying that we “know” in any definitive sense that our view of the world and our relationship to it is correct. Still, it is possible to hold to the view of the world that gives us reason to recognize its vulnerability to being doubted, to pose on its basis reasons to doubt specific knowledge, and to offer on its basis ways to discover more of what there is in the world. To begin to see how, let us turn to the notion of using the light.

### 3 Using the Light

The reference to *yi ming* is sometimes taken to be an assertion that there is a way of knowing that is not subject to skeptical doubt. This way may be a kind of knowing-how different in kind from propositional knowledge (e.g., see Ivanhoe 1993; Eno 1996), or it may be a kind of mystical, ineffable insight into the nature of things or their oneness (e.g., Roth 2003). The skepticism, on this interpretation, is limited to

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<sup>3</sup>I choose the close-to-literal translation of “using the light” for 以明 because it preserves a variety of options for the interpreter. I explain the options I take.

skepticism about words, argument, and discursive theory (for a criticism of interpretations that attribute to the *Zhuangzi* belief in a kind of knowledge exempt from skeptical doubt, see Chiu 2018). Such interpretations accord with passages that focus on the difficulty we have with words and argument, as in the passage about the shifting meaning of words and the futility of arguments between the Confucians and Mohists, or ones we try to resolve by bringing on more participants. Such passages, however, do not explicitly limit skepticism to words, arguments, and theories. Given the elusiveness of the language in the text, it is not surprising that it is hard to definitively rule out the presence of a voice speaks for unmediated access to the world as it is. The interpretation of constructive skepticism, however, does not require ruling out such a voice. In fact, it is consistent with constructive skepticism to affirm the possibility of unmediated access, because to rule it out would be dogmatic, no less dogmatic than accepting the voice without questioning.

In fact, the advantage that constructive skepticism has, when construed as the dominant view of the text, is that it is consistent with all the other views voiced in the text about the human epistemic relation to the world. None can be dogmatically dismissed. All are to be given a hearing. And it is perfectly in the spirit of the text that no view is given unambiguous endorsement as the authorial voice, whoever the author may be. We, the audience, are left to make up our minds, as would be in the spirit of constructive skepticism.

It is also true, moreover, that we are given reasons to doubt the certitude of those who think they have unmediated and absolute access to the world as it is. Consider that in the “Equalizing Assessments” chapter Zhuāngzǐ asks, “How, then, do I know that delighting in life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like an orphan who left home in youth and no longer knows the way back?” (予惡乎知說生之非惑邪! 予惡乎知惡死之非弱喪而不知歸者邪!) (Ziporyn 2009: 19). And later, “While dreaming you don’t know it’s a dream. You might even interpret a dream in your dream—and then you wake up and realize it was all a dream. Perhaps a great awakening would reveal all of this to be a vast dream” (方其夢也, 不知其夢也。夢之中又占其夢焉, 覺而後知其夢也。且有大覺而後知此其大夢也, translation from Ziporyn 2009: 19). Unmediated access to the world may be a dream, or a dream within a dream.

If we adopt constructive skepticism as our view, we accept the inevitability of mediated, not unmediated, access to the world. Using the light involves recognition of the way we contribute to the construction of the worlds we live in and how this contribution provides plenty of reason to doubt the completeness and/or accuracy of what we think we know. But it also is this recognition that can prompt us to reconceptualize, to reselect from the alternation so as to attain new insight in the world.

Consider perception as a mode of access to the world, which is featured in the opening story of the first chapter, “Free and Easy Wandering” (*Xiao Yao You* 逍遙遊), when the huge fish Kun turns into an enormous bird Peng. When Peng launches himself 90,000 miles up into the sky, we are asked whether the “blue on blue” (蒼蒼) of the sky is its true color, or whether it is simply the distance that makes it look that way. After all, when Peng looks down, he sees only this and nothing more (1.3–4; Ziporyn 2009: 130). We, looking around on earth, see much more than Peng

does from high in the sky, so perhaps Peng's skyward haunts are similarly populated with things we cannot see from down here on earth. The story goes on to detail that Peng's size makes it necessary for him to put a great deal of air underneath his wings in order to bear him up. On the other hand, considerably smaller creatures such as the cicada and fledgling dove struggle to make it from the sandalwood to the elm tree, and they scoff at the idea that Peng could go 90,000 miles up in the sky. These three creatures illustrate that their size and powers to navigate their environment determine their *Umwelten*—the worlds of their perceptions and in which they act as subjects.<sup>4</sup> An organism “selects” from the alternation, given its size, powers and needs, and this selection determines the character of its world (see Cantor 2020 for a related interpretation of the “Happy Fish” story in chapter 17, “Autumn Floods” (*Qiushui* 秋水), chapter).

Some of the latest scientific work on the nature of perception indicates that it is not a passive reception of a sensory “given”, not a reception of a direct message from the world which we then proceed to conceptualize and make inferences from and theorize about, but rather partly constituted by what we expect to see. More specifically, perception turns out to involve educated guesses as to what is out there in the world that is impinging on us. What we see is in great part shaped by what we expect to see given our past experiences and what we have been taught to expect to see. As philosopher of mind Andy Clark observes, part of what makes this process tricky is that “a single pattern of sensory stimulation will be consistent with many different sets of worldly causes, distinguished only by their relative (and context-dependent) probability of occurrence” (Clark 2016: 21).

According to the various theories based on these general ideas, we predict what is causing the sensory stimulation we are getting, but are continuously over the course of perception adjusting those predictions according to the match or lack of match with sensory stimulation in the next moment. On Clark's apt image, perception is a matter of “surfing the incoming waves of sensory stimulation” in the sense that we are making continual adjustments to the waves as we encounter them (Clark 2016: 52).

For example, the initial sensory stimulation we receive at the outset of a perceptual experience may lead us to expect that we are seeing a human face, and based on that expectation we make predictions as to what further stimulation we get in the next moment, and those predictions prompt us to turn our gaze toward certain regions of the visual field. We may then get confirmation through reception of sensory stimulation suggesting the shape of a nose, but if we do not, we may have to come up with alternative hypotheses as to what we are seeing and make new predictions, which in turn prompt us to search the visual field in different locations.

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<sup>4</sup>The term ‘Umwelt’ (‘Umwelten’ is the plural form) literally means “surrounding-world” in German, and was coined by Jakob von Uexküll, a biologist who studied the senses of organisms such as ticks, sea urchins, amoebae, jellyfish and sea worms (von Uexküll 2010). He theorized that each kind of organism experienced the world from their distinctive perspectives. There is a remarkable resonance between Zhuangzi and von Uexküll on this score.

This picture of two-way processing, from the bottom and from the top, also suggests a major source of human error. When we become too invested in our predictions, our processing of sensory stimulation may lead us to ignore some disconfirming parts of the signal and to amplify confirming parts. Susanna Siegel gives the example of Jill's believing without justification that Jack is angry at her (Siegel 2002). When she sees Jack, her expectations make him look angry to her. Her top-down processing leads her to ignore some parts of the signals from Jack as mere noise and to amplify others. This leads her to scan Jack's face, gestures, and bodily postures for more signs of anger. She ends up finding evidence for her expectation.<sup>5</sup> Action and perception, as Clark puts it, are "locked into mutually misleading cycle" (Clark 2016: 73).

Perhaps it will be objected that Siegel's case involves too much of a theory-laced element of interpretation of another's emotions, so that it fails to be a persuasive case of how *perception* may err based on expectations acting as a filter of sensory stimulation. However, the view of perception we are coming to recently is that it is very much theory-laced, even if much of the theory we marshal in perceiving the world is non-consciously applied. Further, there are well-known experiments indicating how much top-down processing can influence perceptions we normally assume to be very bottom up. For example, if we are shown a rotating face mask, we know that one side of the mask is the outside, convex shape of a person's face while the other is the inside concave shape made to fit onto a real person's face. However, as the mask rotates from a view of its outside convex face to the inside concave face shape, and if lighting conditions eliminate shadows, we only fleetingly hold onto the perception of the concave, inside the mask view. The perception flips into that of a convex face shape.<sup>6</sup>

How does this happen? Information from the three-dimensional world comes into our two-dimensional retina, and we have to reconstruct the world based on the signals together with our expectations. There are no shadows on the concave side to give us strong cues as to the shape of what is in front us. Moreover, the face is so significant for human beings that we have special neural equipment to read it. Our strong expectations as to what faces look like overrides the awareness that one side of the mask is concave. We have the perceptual experience of a convex face shape.

Now, consider that we are now coming to a new kind of theory as to what memory is, not as a video and audio recorder of events in the past, but as hypotheses or

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<sup>5</sup>Kim-Chong Chong has drawn to my attention a story with similar import from *The Annals of Lü Buwei* (Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 286–87). A man who lost an ax suspected his neighbor's son. He observed the son's walk, expression and words, every action and attitude, as those of a man who would steal an ax. When he found his ax in a ditch, the man saw his neighbor's son again, and this time there was nothing in his actions or attitudes that resembled those of one who would steal an ax. It was not the neighbor's son who changed, but the man, and this change had to do with *you suo you ye* 有所尤也. Knoblock and Riegel translate the concluding phrase as locating the source of the change in the man's having been initially "prejudiced." Drawing from D. C. Lau, Chong suggests an alternative reading of the concluding phrase as indicating the man's perspective having been initially "confined" or limited (Lau 1991: 16–18).

<sup>6</sup>See <https://michaelbach.de/ot/fcs-hollowFace/index.html>.

reconstructions of what happened given fragmentary memory traces (e.g., see De Brigard 2014). Combined with the picture of perception as surfing waves of sensory stimulation through prediction based on some part of our prior conceptions of the world, we get a picture of ourselves as living our whole lives within our constructed worlds, our own *Umwelten*. Of course, our subjective worlds are formed through interaction with the independently existing world that is common to us human beings. Human *Umwelten* tend to share common features because of the similar construction of our sensory apparatus, similar needs that lead us to explore the environment in similar ways, similar powers of navigating that environment, as well as culturally-shared constructions of that independently existing world.

A striking passage in the “Equalizing Assessments of Things” chapter seems to connect the variability in the *Umwelten* of various animals with the idea that different animals “fit” their environment in different ways because of the differences between their sizes, needs, and powers to engage with it:

When people sleep in a damp place, they wake up deathly ill and sore about the waist—but what about eels? If people live in trees, they tremble with fear and worry—but how about monkeys? Of these three, which ‘knows’ what is the right [zheng 正] place to live? People eat the flesh of their livestock, deer eat grass, snakes eat centipedes, hawks and eagles eat mice. Of these four, which ‘knows’ the right thing to eat? Monkeys take she-monkeys for mates, bucks mount does, male fish frolic with female fish, while humans regard Mao Qiang and Lady Li as great beauties—but when fish see them they dart into the depths, when birds see them they soar into the skies, when deer see them they bolt away without looking back. Which of these four ‘knows’ what is rightly alluring? From where I see it, the transitions of Humanity and Responsibility and the trails of right and wrong are hopelessly tangled and confused. How could I know how to distinguish which is right among them? (Ziporyn 2009: 18).

民淫寢則腰疾偏死，鱔然乎哉？木處則惴慄恟懼，猿猴然乎哉？三者孰知正處？民食芻豢，麋鹿食薦，螂且甘帶，鴟鴞耆鼠，四者孰知正味？猿，獼狌以為雌，麋與鹿交，鱔與魚游。毛嫱，麗姬，人之所美也，魚見之深入，鳥見之高飛，麋鹿見之決驟。四者孰知天下之正色哉？自我觀之，仁義之端，是非之塗，樊然殽亂，吾惡能知其辯！

Notice that if the point of these observations about various animals is a fairly simple relativism to the effect that each picks out the features of the environment that is the most relevant to their size, needs, and powers, there need be no skeptical thrust. People, deer, snakes, hawks and eagles eat different things because they are different creatures, but this difference in what is right for each of them need not pose problems for the prospects of gaining knowledge. Yet the passage ends with the declaration that the trails of right and wrong are hopelessly tangled and confused. This conclusion would make sense if the point instead is that different animals are inevitably partial in selecting the features of the environment that are the most suitable given their size, needs, and powers. The *Umwelt* of an animal is likely to leave out features of the world that are not so relevant to its needs, and maybe some features are out of reach entirely from the creature’s powers of understanding and perception.

It is also highly significant that right before the quoted part above, Wang Ni is asked if he knows that he does not know (子知子之所不知邪?). The answer is,

“How could I know that?” (吾惡乎知之!). This indicates that the sort of skepticism in play here is not dogmatic skepticism that forecloses or deems futile the activity of attempted discovery. In fact, there are indications that the sort of constructive skepticism advocated in the text can aid in discovery. In the “Free and Easy Wandering” chapter, Huizi planted the seed of a great gourd, and it grew to be over a hundred pounds. Filling it with liquid, he found it not firm enough to lift. Cutting it in half, he found it too large to scoop into anything. Concluding that it was useless, Huizi smashed it to pieces. Zhuangzi scolded his friend for not knowing how to use the gourd, asking why he had never thought of making it into a vessel to float through the lakes and rivers with. That Huizi could only think about using the gourd to scoop into things meant that he still had a lot of tangled weeds clogging up his mind (則夫子猶有蓬之心也夫!) (1.14, Ziporyn 2009: 7).

What prevents Huizi from seeing how he could use the gourd is his preconception of how gourds can be used. He has already deemed and affirmed the use of the gourd to scoop, and when the gourd does not accord with this preconception, he deems it “incorrect” or “wrong” and smashes it to pieces. Our so-called knowledge of the uses of things can rigidify and keep us from looking further into how we might relate to them, especially when a new situation makes the received uses irrelevant. Here the gourd story prefigures the theme from the “Equalizing Assessments of Things” chapter that those who engage in *shi*-ing and *fēi*-ing are “[h]eld fast as if bound by cords,” and continue “along the same ruts.” When we encounter things that render inadequate our entrenched preconceptions of how to put them to use, we lose the flexibility of response necessary to stay alive.

## 4 Losing One’s Self

The “Autumn Floods” chapter contains characters who have not learned that what they know is far less than what they do not know (計人之所知, 不若其所不知). They take their *Umwelten* to constitute the whole world, and characteristically, their worlds are selected to highlight their own importance and pre-eminence. The needs of a creature that go into the selection and construction of its *Umwelten* are not just biological or physical but psychological. Such is the case with the frog in the sunken well. Not only is he happy cavorting in his well, jumping about on the railings and beams, and splashing in the water and treading in the mud, but the surrounding crabs and tadpoles are no match for him. For him, it is perfection to have mastery over a whole puddle of water. When the frog invites the tortoise of the Eastern Ocean into his abode, the tortoise cannot even get in without getting stuck. He tells the frog of the ocean’s vastness, even in Yu’s time of the great floods, its waters never rose, that in the times of the droughts its shores did not recede. Hearing of this, the frog was astonished and utterly discouraged (Ziporyn: 2009: 74–75).

The frog exemplifies the human need to see ourselves as masters of the world, a need satisfied through selectively constructing our own little worlds. To “use the



light,” then, we may have to lose the self that looms so large in our sunken-well worlds. It is significant that the passage that puts forward “using the light” as a way of transcending the futile arguments of philosophers and others who insist on their way of seeing the world begins with Ziqi declaring, “I have lost me” (吾喪我). We are able to use the light only when we have lost the self that constricts our worlds.

Thus, one of the biggest causes of the tangled weeds that clog up the mind, to go back to the image Zhuangzi applies to Huizi’s failure to find a use for the gourds, is the self. This insight receives much confirmation in contemporary cognitive and social psychology. Joachim Krueger has characterized the ego as like “a totalitarian government,” shaping its perception in such a way that “it protects a sense of its own good will, its central place in the social world and its control over relevant outcomes” (Krueger 2003: 585; see also Greenwald 1980). A study (Stone et al. 2017) based on cardiac operations and interviews of surgical teams found that teams that worked effectively together were led by surgeons who were approachable and inviting of others to contribute, while the ones that did not work together effectively were more autocratic in style and especially struggled when they felt their authority was being threatened. In another study, the leaders of teams charged with decision-making tasks were induced to feel powerful. Such leaders were found to dominate discussion and as a consequence missed learning critical information that their teams had (Tost et al. 2013).

The fourth chapter, “In the Human World” (*Ren jian shi* 人間世), takes up a number of these themes in a way that is unusual for not being entirely negative about the Confucian project of trying to correct the course of rulers. Appropriately enough, its main dialogues are between Confucius and Yan Hui. Yan Hui desires to go to the ruler of Wei who is heedless of the lives of his people and piles up their corpses throughout his land. Yan Hui wishes to take what he has learned from Confucius and derive standards and principles to apply to the situation. Though Confucius expresses skepticism about the prospects of success for his student, he does give him advice if he insists on going.

Do you know what it is that undermines real Virtuosity, and for what purpose, on the contrary, ‘cleverness’ comes forth? Virtuosity is undermined by (4:3) getting a name for it. Cleverness comes forth from conflict. For a good name is most essentially a way for people to one-up each other, and cleverness is most essentially a weapon for winning a fight. (Ziporyn 2009: 24–25).

且若亦知夫德之所蕩，而知之所為出乎哉？德蕩乎名，知出乎爭。名也者，相軋也；知也者，爭之器也。

*De* 德, aptly translated above as “Virtuosity” by Ziporyn, is the power to respond efficaciously to the circumstances at hand, and this power cannot be derived from applying standards and principles derived from someone’s prior selection of *shi/fei*’s. Yan Hui’s efficacy, Confucius implies, is hampered by his desire for a good name,<sup>7</sup> and here *zhi* 知, elsewhere better translated as “knowledge,” is aptly translated as cleverness, an instrument for manipulating people. Confucius’ advice to

<sup>7</sup>Kim-Chong Chong is especially insightful on the way the *Zhuangzi* is critical of this self-serving motivation as underlying Confucian moralizing (Chong 2016).



Yan Hui includes perceptive observations about the counterproductive effects of moral lectures that are motivated by the desire to one-up others, dangerous effects if these others are amoral and powerful. Even if Yan Hui's Virtuosity were ample, reliable and firm, and unmotivated by the desire for a good name, he will simply be showing off his own beauty at the expense of the ruler's ugliness unless he comprehends the man's *qi* 氣 vital energies and his mind. Yan Hui presents an array of strategies for dealing with the ruler, but Confucius dismisses them all, saying, "You are still (4:8) taking your mind as your instructor" (猶師心者也) (Ziporyn 2009: 26).

To cease making his mind as his instructor, Confucius tells Yan Hui, he must fast (*zhai* 齋) the mind. When Yan Hui asks what this fasting is, Confucius talks of merging all intentions into a singularity (若一志). He talks of hearing with the mind rather than with the ears (無聽之以耳而聽之以心). Further, it is hearing "with the vital energy rather than with the mind." (Ziporyn: 2009: 26) (無聽之以心而聽之以氣).

For the ears are halted at what they hear. The mind is halted at whatever verifies its preconceptions. But the vital energy is an emptiness, a waiting for the presence of beings. (Ziporyn: 2009: 26).

聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。

Yan Hui then describes his experiences of such fasting:

Yan Hui said, "Before I find what moves me into activity, it is myself that is full and real. But as soon as I find what moves me, it turns out that 'myself' has never begun to exist." (Ziporyn 2009: 27).

回之未始得使，實自回也；得使之也，未始有回也。

Confucius' advocacy of fasting and its result in Yan Hui of a loss of his self fits very well with the Ziqi's loss of his self in the *Qi Wu Lun*. The selves and Umwelten our minds construct out of the alternation rigidify, partly out of needs to see our selves as important. They prevent us from being flexible in response to new situations, such as encounter with the ruler of Wei. In terms of the contemporary model of perception earlier outlined, the desire to see the present situation in the terms most flattering to the self encourages the tailoring of one's interpretation of sensory stimulation to accord with one's predictions of the pre-eminence of the self.

## 5 Going by the Rightness of the Present "This"

This is not to deny that familiar or received aspects of Umwelten can be appropriate responses to the present situation. At a later point in "In the Human World" chapter, Zigao is appointed envoy to Qi, and he becomes apprehensive. If he fails, he will get into trouble with other people; if he succeeds he will trouble the internal balance between his *yin* and *yang* (陰陽). Confucius' advice is to accept the two great constraints of this world: "Being a son or a subordinate, there will inevitably be things you cannot avoid having to do. Absorb yourself in the realities of the task at hand to the point of forgetting your own existence. Then you will have no leisure to delight

in life (4:14) or abhor death. That would make this mission of yours quite doable!” (Ziporyn 2009: 28). There is no indication here that Confucius’ advice is being denigrated or presented in a mocking tone.

Yet the perspective it advocates starkly contrasts with other passages in which being a subordinate is certainly presented as neither inevitable nor desirable. There is the story in the “Autumn Floods” chapter in which Zhuangzi dismisses emissaries from the King of Chu who ask him to take control of all the king’s realm. He would prefer, he says, to be a live turtle and dragging his backside through the mud than a sacred turtle dead for three thousand years and kept in a bamboo chest by the King.

In the same chapter, not coincidentally, it is proposed to make rightness one’s master and eliminate wrongness (蓋師是而無非) and to make only order our master and eliminate chaos (師治而無亂). Ruo of the Northern Sea replies that that would be like taking Heaven as one’s master but not earth, or *yin* alone as one’s master and eliminating *yang*. The rulers of the Three Dynasties sometimes yielded their thrones to others and sometimes passed them on to their sons. The ones who acted on these policies at the wrong time got called usurpers, and the ones who did it at the right times were called righteous. The implication is that no uniform rule, such as yielding or passing on, can be relied upon. Ruo of the Northern Sea replies, “[D]o not restrict your will, but expansively limp and stagger along with the Course” (無拘而志，與道大蹇). A bit later, he adds, “[D]o not unify your conduct, but be uneven and varied along with the Course” (無一而行，與道參差) (translation, Ziporyn 2009: 72).

A given instance of passing on the throne to others or to one’s sons was right or fitting to that moment, but human beings mistakenly infer a uniformity to the rightness that goes beyond that moment. Reliance on our conceptualizations, our selections from the alternation, when they have overrun the occasions on which they are apt, does not enable us to travel the uneven and varied Course. From the perspective of our orderly conceptualizations, we are limping and staggering along in an unprincipled eclectic fashion, first accepting loyalty to one’s ruler as our fate, and then choosing the mud. Consider this related passage from the “Equalizing Assessments of Things” chapter:

It is all just a matter of going by the rightness of the present ‘this.’ To be doing this without knowing it, and not because you have defined it as right, is called ‘the Course’ [the Dao] (Ziporyn 2009: 14).

因是已。已而不知其然，謂之道。

If we become aware of how our conceptualizations form a scheme of *shifei*’s and that there are endless alternative schemes that interface with our common world, we may be receptive to entering, at least partially, into the *Umwelten* of others and be able to work with them. Confucius applies a scheme to the situation in which an envoy’s anxieties need to be soothed. The scheme in which accepting political responsibility is like consenting to be put into a bamboo box is what works for Zhuangzi when the emissaries of the king call upon him. In dealing with others we “go along with them” and enter their *Umwelten*. The monkey trainer in the “Equalizing Assessment of Things” chapter enrages the monkeys by offering them

three chestnuts in the morning and four in the evening, but delights them when he offers them four in the morning and three in the evening. It is all the same to the keeper, but a world of difference to the monkeys. The trainer did not just go by the rightness of his own present “this” but by the rightness of their present “this” (Ziporyn 2009: 14).

In effect, Confucius is advising Yan Hui to go by the rightness of that ruler’s “this,” apart from all of his own preconceived ideas as to how to improve people, and only then can he have a chance to change the ruler. To do this, he must damp down his personal investment in succeeding by fasting his mind. Indeed, he must cease making the mind his instructor and listen with his *qi* or vital energies, and fasting, which might be a kind of quiet sitting or meditation, is what helps. Then he is prepared to go along with the ruler:

With this you can play in his cage without impinging on his concern for a good name. When he’s receptive, do your crowing, but when he’s not, let it rest. Do not let him get to you, but do not harm him either. (Ziporyn 2009: 27).

若能入遊其樊而无感其名，入則鳴，不入則止。無門无毒。

In particular, sitting meditation may prepare the mind so as to be more receptive to signals that are ignored or given lesser weight because they do not correspond to our expectations, ones we might be inclined to dismiss as “noise.” If predictions based on expectations tend to act as filters, then “We tend to see what we expect, and we use that to confirm the model that is both generating our expectations, and sculpting and filtering both our observations and our estimates of their reliability” (Clark 2016: 25).

Recognizing the partiality of one’s conceptualizations, that one’s “wrong” may be another’s “right,” being receptive to and ready to act on the other’s present “this,” is what I think the text is getting at in the “Equalizing Assessment of Things” chapter in the following passage:

When this axis finds its place in the center, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted (2:17) by none. For it has an endless supply of “rights,” and an endless supply of (2:18) “wrongs.” Thus, I say, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious [yi ming 以明 or using the light] (Ziporyn 2009: 12).

樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰「莫若以明」。

## 6 Listening with one’s *qi*

Confucius’ advice is directed toward getting Yan Hui’s *qi* in a receptive state and ready to “read,” so to speak, the young Lord’s *qi*. We comprehend others with more than our minds. It is now a commonplace that people who tend to be in synchrony with each other while conversing non-consciously mimic each other’s postures and gestures. Further, we humans do have impressive abilities to read one another’s nonverbal language of physical postures, gestures and facial expressions, and this kind of knowledge often sits below the level of conscious awareness and is not recorded in propositions. Participants in one study were able to identify facial

expressions they glimpsed for only five milliseconds (Rosenthal et al. 1979). In another study participants were able to order fourteen photographs of the temporal sequence of an emotion unfolding over the course of less than one second (Edwards 1998). A third study reported that participants were able to detect minute violations of the basic proportions of the human face (Lewicki 1986). They felt something was wrong with the faces, but none of them were able to identify what was wrong. Such skill in nonverbal decoding improves from early childhood through early adulthood. As the neuroscientist Matthew Lieberman observes, “the dance of nonverbal communication between people occurs intuitively, and when we get a sense of the other’s state of mind as a result of the nonverbal cues the other has presented, we often have nothing other than our intuition to justify our inferences” (Lieberman 2000: 123).

Our interactions with others leave their marks on our *qi* in that it records the positive and negative impressions others make on us. There is knowledge of who they are that is embedded in us, waiting to be taken advantage of if we are open to their input. Consider Antonio Damasio’s seminal theory of somatic markers (Damasio 1994). On this theory subjective feeling is constituted by the mental states arising from the neural representation of various changes occurring within the chemical landscape of the body. These somatic changes are responses to a precipitating event or stimulus, and may serve the role of making one ready for action. Our interactions with others are among these precipitating events or stimuli, and can produce positive and negative effects that get embodied in somatic markers. A related feature of Clark’s prediction-driven theory of perception is that we register information from the environment in the form of interoceptive, visceral signals from the body that can lead to expectations or predictions.

Neuroscientific studies have revealed that some of the brain regions implicated in face-to-face social interaction are subcortical and include some of the most ancient such as the basal ganglia (as mentioned earlier, we share this region with fish). These subcortical areas also seem to be involved in non-conscious, so-called “implicit learning” such as the automatic execution of learned motor plans (Lieberman 2000). The basal ganglia is also involved with motor control, but also executive functions and behaviors, and emotions. It is involved in a crucial mechanism we have for checking for events happening outside our current focus of attention that might be of possible relevance to us. It turns out that the brain rhythmically alternates between intensifying sensory focus on what it is currently attending to, on the one hand, and weakening that focus, thus giving us a chance to attend to other things that might be important to us (Fiebelkorn and Kastner 2019; Nakajima et al. 2019). This shift is related to saccadic eye movements, the eyes quickly darting back and forth that we perform at intervals. This shift is part of the fundamental basis for human cognitive flexibility. We are capable of intensely engaging in a task, but when complexities arise or a new factor enters the scene, we are capable of shifting and dealing with them. The multiple functions of the basal ganglia indicate that our perception and cognition of the world is intimately tied with our exploration of the world, with the way we move through the world and engage with it.

The depictions of skillful action in the *Zhuangzi* are quite compatible with these ideas. The learning of skills might begin with conscious self-direction. For example, one might rely on mnemonics to facilitate retrieval of knowledge as in learning how to play a musical instrument and reading from sheet music (Lieberman 2000: 118). With practice, knowledge comes readily, no longer relying on mnemonics. When encoded on the non-conscious level, the skillful actions learned come much faster and more fluidly. Lieberman gives the example of a defensive basketball player who has learned to recognize the fake-out move of an offensive player, designed to misdirect and get the defensive player going in the wrong direction. The defensive player may learn to recognize the fake-out move, with the basal ganglia encoding the visual pattern, enabling an accurate and rapid response (Lieberman 2000: 118).

Thus, consider the story of the cicada catcher in the “Fathoming Life” (*Da Sheng* 達生) chapter. His path to the skill of catching cicadas with a glue-tipped stick lay in learning to balance an increasing number of pellets on top of the stick. When he gets to the point of being able to balance five at once, it is as if he catches cicadas by plucking them with his hand. In fact, our latest theories about how humans become adept at using objects as tools to accomplish tasks feature the role of “body-schemas,” sensory motor capacities that give us a sense of where our bodies are in space (Gallagher 2009). When we become practiced in using something as a tool, they become extensions of our hands as registered in neural representations that constitute body schemas. It’s as if the cicada catcher’s stick is his elongated arm and hand, at least for the purpose of catching cicadas. Furthermore, catching moving creatures involves anticipation, prediction, of where they will be in the next few moments, thus relating to the conception of perception as involving the prediction or anticipation of what incoming sensory stimulation will be like in the near future. People just learning to drive focus their gaze just in front of the car as they take a curve. Seasoned drivers look further ahead, allocating their gaze three-seconds ahead of the speed of travel (Tatler et al. 2011; Clark 2016: 68).

Finally let me turn to the story of Cook Ding in the “The Primacy of Nourishing Life” (*Yang Sheng Zhu* 養生主) chapter whose dance in cutting up oxen is a marvel to behold. The cook says that when he first began cutting up oxen, he didn’t look at anything but oxen, but after three years, he still couldn’t see everything about the ox. Now he has so mastered the art that he performs his task in dance-like fashion and does not need to look with his eyes when moving the knife through an ox’s joints and spaces. He encounters them with “spirit” (*shen* 神). He relies “on Heaven’s unwrought perforations,<sup>8</sup> strikes in the big gaps” and is “guided by the large fissures ...” (Ziporyn 2009: 22) (所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾 ...).

<sup>8</sup>In my understanding of this passage I am guided by Ziporyn’s translation, and in particular the articulation that the cook after three years still could not see everything about the ox, and the articulation of *tian li* 天理 as the more literal “natural perforations” or as Ziporyn puts it, “Heaven’s unwrought perforations” (where the ox could be parted into pieces) rather than the neo-Confucian “Heavenly Patterns” (Ziporyn 2009: 22).

Here we might see suggested the self-conscious learning of an activity that eventually becomes mastered as a largely nonconscious easeful carving of the ox. He does not have to look with his eyes anymore but encounters them with “spirit.” This might be an implied contrast to being guided by what is already fully formed in the mind, as mentioned in the “Equalizing Assessments of Things” passage. In our contemporary scientific terms, the cook is relying on kinesthetic feedback as the knife, no doubt an extension of his arm and hand and in fact his whole dancing body, slides its way through the ox. One type of contemporary skill activity that relies considerably on kinesthetic feedback is in fact surgery, where it must sometimes take place inside the body and thus where visual feedback on what one is doing is very limited. One study on skill learning on surgical-like tasks using only kinesthetic feedback (Pinzon et al. 2017) showed that novice learners could through repeated trials of performing the same task while blindfolded get better and make fewer errors. They had come to encode the task in their muscle memory.

This does not mean that mind is uninvolved. This point becomes clear when the cook describes what he does when he encounters a “clustered tangle” (每至於族) (Ziporyn 2009: 22) in the ox: he proceeds as if terrified and comes to a complete halt. He moves his blade ever so slightly and suddenly finds the ox dismembered. In terms of Clark’s prediction-driven model of perception, the cook has encountered a moment when his predictions for incoming sensory stimulation are inadequate. Or to return to an earlier analogy, the driver has come across a tangle of cars in an accident scene and they must now stop and take stock of the current situation and the available options given the situation. The cook’s coming to a complete halt and then his blade moving ever so slightly means that he must give greater weight to the sensory flow coming from the bottom-up, carefully feeling his way for an opening, but this means that his mind halts the flow of non-conscious predictions built from past experience and the automatic actions linked to these predictions.

## 7 Nourishing Life

It seems to me that this is the greater lesson for nourishing life that King Hui of Liang says he has gleaned from the cook. It is not that one must practice every activity in life so that one can perform it in an easeful, non-conscious fashion, for that would be impossible. Nor is the lesson that one can dispense with the *shifei*’s, the conceptualizations of the mind, in favor of a direct, unmediated access to the way things are. Or if that is one lesson sometimes suggested in the text, the text provides a powerful framework for skeptically examining its viability. On my interpretation, the overarching frame is the view that the whole person, the mind, the vital energy, can be receptive to the discrepancies between one’s favored conceptualizations and the incoming flow from the world. It can become better by being more sensitive to the discrepancies rather than passing over them for the sake of maintaining one’s “knowledge,” one’s important, authoritative place in the world. One can be open to learning from the others featured in the “Markers of Full Virtuosity” (*De chong fu*

德充符) chapter who are disfavored under one's favorite conceptualizations, those missing a hand or a foot because they have been punished.

As I have stressed, such a view does not deny the possibility of knowledge. It regards such denials as dogmatic. It is in fact premised on a particular view of the human place in the world, and the state of our capacities to get a conceptual grasp on what goes on in it (even if there is readiness to question this view). It is a view that the world constantly frustrates our attempts to pin it down but also expresses some confidence in the human capacity to recalibrate its bearings in the world by focusing on the present particularities of the situation and being flexible enough to see which kind of approach might do for the present "this." Our modes of connection to the world always exceed and overflow any current conceptualization we may have of it, but may at any given time feel as if we have discovered some more of it, if only for that moment and in those circumstances.

## 8 Conclusion

Let me end with a few comments on potential problems with the way I have brought the *Zhuangzi* into dialogue with some of the most insightful philosophical and scientific work that should make us take it very seriously. I of course do not mean to attribute to the text the possession of most of the concepts and models that I have articulated from the side of contemporary philosophy and current science. However, the philosophy and science helps us to validate and to understand the basis of certain features of human experience that show up in the text: the partiality and incompleteness of our perceptual and cognitive encounters with the world, and yet our confidence that we "know" it, our discombobulation when we recognize it as *over*-confidence and when we encounter others who apparently live in different worlds; and our experiences of discoveries we can make that do not involve our conscious minds that are set on received theories, but through our embodied explorations.

We can come to understand our situation as creatures in nature, who like other creatures, are using the capacities we have been given to make our way in a multifaceted and continuously changing environment. Comparing ourselves to other creatures, we might recognize their different capacities and the different ways they are fitted to make their way in the environment. This can lead us to suspect that they may be perceiving features of the environment we do not perceive because these features are relevant to their different constitutions. Their different perceptions fit their different needs. The less perceptive among us simply impose our own perceptions and needs on differently constituted creatures. In the "Fathoming Life" (*Da sheng* 達生) chapter, the ruler of Lu took to a bird who came to Lu, and treated it to the finest of meats and music. The bird only looked worried and sad, and did not eat or drink.



This is called trying to nourish a bird with what would nourish oneself. To nourish a bird as the bird itself would want to be nourished, you should let it perch in the deep forests and glide through the rivers and lakes, allowing it to eat whatever wiggly things it can find—for this creature such a life is as comfortable as walking along on level ground. (Ziporyn 2009: 83)

此之謂以己養養鳥也。若夫以鳥養養鳥者，宜棲之深林，浮之江湖，食之以委蛇，則平陸而已矣。

Important strands of contemporary philosophy and science on the one hand, and the *Zhuangzi* on the other, converge on a view of the world that is not of our literal making, but which we do conceptually map in order to intelligibly navigate through it. The conceptual makings serve us as we seek to feed ourselves in many ways, and they also limit us. Indeed, they can strangle and choke the life out of us. The text, and some of our most insightful philosophic and scientific work of our era, points to ways we may escape this fate, at least temporarily and partially. It requires that we dethrone the mind from its supreme place, and recognize how we connect through our bodies, and not as passive observers but as active explorers, but who can prepare ourselves for dealing with what we find through quieting the raging egos, through preparing ourselves to listen with everything about us that is connected to the whole.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>My thanks to Hagop Sarkissian and Esther Klein for comments at the conference on “Approaches to Classical Chinese Philosophical Texts” at the University of Pennsylvania, and to Paul R. Goldin for convening the conference.

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# Chapter 28

## Performance and Agency in the *Zhuangzi*



Karyn Lai

### 1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to investigate the *Zhuangzi*'s conception of agency by reflecting on some of its intriguing stories of mastery. The masters' skilled performances involve cultivated—perhaps habitual—actions, as well as intense absorption in the activity. Spectators, including Confucius and his followers, are struck by the efficacy and elegance of the masters' actions and are keen to learn about their expertise. In what senses are these masters *agents*? My approach here is exploratory, raising more questions than the discussion can possibly answer. My intention is to investigate relevant stories from the angle of performance, so as to understand the notion of agency operative in skilful performance. I am especially interested in the cultivation processes some of the masters have undertaken. These processes, it seems, have been designed to help the masters form habits, which in turn play a role in their skilled performances. However, this immediately raises the question of whether these cultivated actions should be thought of as habitual, given that habitual actions are typically considered “unreflective” or “non-intentional” and therefore thought to lack agentive control (Dreyfus 2005; Pollard 2010; Fridland 2017). On the one hand, there seems to be more than a tangential connection between habit and cultivation as both are acquired over time, through repeated practice, in specific conditions. On the other, the term “cultivation” signals deliberate engagement with the iterative process of learning that is not present in mechanical, perhaps compulsive, patterns of behaviour acquired unthinkingly over time, such as a person's having a habit of snacking while watching television. A focal point of my discussion is the masters' *unreflective* skilled actions, *enabled* by the cultivation of relevant habitual

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actions. Thus, it is the former sense of habit—habit deliberately cultivated—that is relevant to this discussion.<sup>1</sup>

The points raised here hint at debates in contemporary Anglophone philosophy of mind and action on *agentive* presence. These debates typically identify higher order awareness, intentionality, or control, as evidence of agency (see, e.g. Anscombe 1957; Rietveld 2010; Brownstein 2014; Fridland 2017; Bermúdez 2017). My intention is not to engage with these debates in a way to suggest that the *Zhuangzi* can contribute to discussions about cognitive states and higher-order forms of awareness. Yet, although the *Zhuangzi* does not provide sufficiently fine-grained considerations to help resolve these debates, its skill stories approach similar questions from a different angle, by attending to practical and logistical matters such as cultivation and performance, matters that are sometimes ellipsed in these debates.

Here is one example. In debates in the philosophy of action in Anglophone philosophy, a widely-shared assumption about *action*, as contrasted with unintentional and unreflective *habit*, is the former's ensuing from an agent's intentions and goals. A prevalent feature in debates is the assumption that agents must be able to answer "Anscombean" questions about their actions; that is, "why" questions about the intentions driving their actions (Anscombe 1957). This conception of action, with *intentionality* identified as the defining feature of actions, is a familiar one in philosophical debates on action (see, e.g., Brownstein 2014). Can this explanatory framework help us understand the skill stories in the *Zhuangzi*? The actions of the masters seem habitual and unreflective, as they do not have to pause to think about their next move; their encounters with specific circumstances seem sufficient to trigger and sustain their manoeuvres. Yet, on the other hand, the masters are *also* deeply engrossed in their activities. Primarily exploring evidence for intentionality or higher-order awareness may not suffice to highlight the intertwined nature of habitual action and attentiveness, that are central to Zhuangzian performance.

In the discussion below, I begin by setting out the background to Zhuangzian performance in existing debates. In Sect. 1, I briefly introduce the *Zhuangzi*'s performance orientation. This opens up room for us to home in on the performances of the masters, an important theme across the skill stories in the *Zhuangzi*. Sect. 2 investigates the accounts given by some of the masters, regarding how they have attained skill. The aim is to explore the ways in which they may be considered self-aware and exercising control, in relation to their skill cultivation. Yet, intriguingly, as Sect. 3 highlights, some of the masters report that their skilful performances require their *forgetting* aspects of the world, in some cases including forgetting their physical form, so that they can be attentive to particular components of their activity. I propose that the *Zhuangzi* distinctively holds that these two facets, habitual responses and attentiveness, are dynamically intertwined in both cultivation and skilled performance. This argument is further developed in Sect. 4 by demonstrating how *responsiveness* to situational demands is a key feature of Zhuangzian expertise.

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<sup>1</sup>There is of course a variety of views on what "habit" means. Carlisle presents a discussion of views available in the Western intellectual tradition (2014).

It also brings out the text's particular approach to cultivation, and the centrality of that in skilled performance. Finally, in Sect. 5, I bring the above discussions together to articulate the distinctive elements of agency in the skill stories.

## 2 Performance: Moving Beyond Intellectual Knowledge

There is a story of a wheelwright, who boldly scrutinises a Duke's approach to government through reading and dwelling on the words of sages past. Presumably, these insights will inform how he leads the people, though we are not told this in the story. As the story begins, Duke Huan sits in the hall above—signifying his elevated status—while wheelwright Bian addresses him from below the hall (*Zhuangzi* 13/68–74).<sup>2</sup> Quite recklessly, the wheelwright disparages Duke Huan's book-reading, caricaturing its words as “the chaff and dregs of the men of old” (trans. Watson 1968: 152–3). The *Zhuangzi* uses this imagery to parody the “words of the sages”, a primary axiological commitment of the *Ru* (儒, scholar-official; Confucian) tradition.<sup>3</sup> Duke Huan's book is a repository of wisdom passed down through the ages. Bian spurns Duke Huan's attempt to acquire wisdom through reading the book by pointing out how the words contained in it are ineffectual for rectifying the world. The incensed Duke demands an explanation from Bian, and if that proves insufficient, he will order Bian's beheading. In response, Bian explains his performance thus:

Speaking for myself, I see it in terms of (how I handle) my work. When I carve a wheel, if I hit the chisel too gently, it slides along but does not take hold. If I hit too hard, it jams and can't go further. Not too gentle, not too hard—I feel it in my hand and respond to it with my heart-mind. I cannot put this into words, even though I grasp what is involved there, *in* the activity. I cannot impart my understanding to my son, and he cannot receive it from me. So, at the elderly age of seventy, I'm still carving wheels. When the men of old died, what they could not transmit died too. Therefore, what you, Sir, are reading must be the sediments of old (dead) men! (*Zhuangzi* 13/68–74)<sup>4</sup>

What *matters* to Bian is expressed in terms of his experience in making wheels. His success is measured in terms of performance (how he chisels, for example). Bian's account explicitly sets up the distinction between *doing* and (the possession of) knowledge of words of wisdom. Strikingly, Bian admits failure in his own experience when he tries to teach his son. We can see the parallels between his failed attempt to teach his son, and Duke Huan's intention to learn how to govern through

<sup>2</sup>References to the *Zhuangzi* text are from the Harvard-Yenching *Zhuangzi Yinde* (Hong 1956), unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup>For example, in a passage in the *Analecets of Confucius*, Confucius is portrayed as saying that “Petty persons, knowing nothing of the propensities of *tian* [heaven], do not hold it in awe; they are unduly familiar with persons in high station, and ridicule the words of the sages” (*Analecets* 16.8; trans. Ames and Rosemont Jr 1998: 198).

<sup>4</sup>All translations of the *Zhuangzi* are presented by the author, unless otherwise specified.

book-reading. Insofar as Bian is unable to impart *performance* to his son, the words of sages in the past will not be able to teach Duke Huan *how to perform* as an official. Because the *Zhuangzi*'s stories focus on skill and performance, scholars in contemporary discussions have aligned its epistemological leanings with knowing how rather than knowing that (see, e.g. Graham 1992; Ivanhoe 1993). Philip Ivanhoe goes further to forge a connection between the *Zhuangzi*'s knowing how and intuitive knowledge. He writes, "For Zhuangzi, knowledge of the *Dao* is a kind of *knowing how*; it is intuitive and spontaneous knowledge of how to act in accordance with the *Dao*" (1993: 648).<sup>5</sup> In later work with Karen Carr, Ivanhoe carves a positive role for knack in the *Zhuangzi*, whereby both "excessive rationality"<sup>6</sup> and "excessive emotion" are avoided (Carr and Ivanhoe 2000: 55). The representations of Zhuangzian knowledge as "knack" or "intuition" will be illuminating if they can articulate how these concepts function *in performance*. However, it appears that not many scholarly discussions have focused on the technicalities and dynamics of performance. In the following sections, I hope to address this gap by sketching out some constitutive elements of skilled performance.

Before I do that, I wish to mention an interesting proposal that carves out a distinctive Zhuangzian epistemology by focusing on performance. Chris Fraser offers an account of action and agency in Chinese philosophy to illuminate performance in contemporary life, including "skilled activities, such as speaking a language, performing music, playing a sport, or carrying out expert work, such as that of a carpenter, waiter, doctor, or university lecturer" (Fraser 2009: 230). Successful performance, according to Fraser, relies on agents' cultivation of "reliable differential responsive dispositions" (RDRDs; a phrase he borrows from Brandom; *ibid.*: 226). Fraser's focus on developing reliable *responsive* dispositions helps highlight a person's practical ability to discriminate between salient features across scenarios, so as to inculcate patterns of activity, appropriately to reflect those embodied by models and exemplars (*ibid.*: 222–9). In the cultivation of RDRDs in Chinese philosophy, he argues, the aim is to acquire "robust, reliable dispositions to act accordingly [to our social roles in accordance with patterns of activity]" (*ibid.*: 226; annotations by author). The discrimination-and-response proposal allows Fraser to

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<sup>5</sup> Ivanhoe writes in a note concerning this point, "It is not perfectly clear whether Zhuangzi believes that this knowledge is innately fully formed and can be released through a sudden act of insight or whether it arises only in the course of practical experience. The latter would appear to be his primary picture, though he seems to place great store on innate and indelible intuitions" (Ivanhoe 1993: 648, note 33).

<sup>6</sup> Some scholars set out the distinctiveness of the *Zhuangzi*'s epistemological approach by deemphasising the place of rationality in the text. For example, Henri Maspero, an influential intellectual historian, proposed that, in the *Zhuangzi*, "[r]easoning itself must be abandoned, for it obscures the true knowledge which is intuitive" (1978: 307). Maspero borrowed from the terms of modern discourse, using such terms as 'raisonnement' and 'intellectuelle' (in his original French version (Maspero 1965: 254–5) to characterise what he perceives as the distinction between Confucianism and Daoism.

See also Graham 2001: 9.



introduce elements of automaticity and intelligence in “the real-time exercise of agency” (*ibid.*: 230).

A strength of this account lies in its capacity also to explain the centrality of cultivation in Chinese philosophy. Let us briefly consider the place of cultivation in the wheelwright’s story. Although most wheelwrights would have carved with the help of measuring instruments, collectively called the “compass and square” (*guiju* 規矩), Bian carves freehand.<sup>7</sup> We know that skills for freehand carving are not acquired overnight, and it may be that it is *freehand carving* that his son has not been able to learn from him. What is involved in the cultivation process? Are the *Zhuangzi*’s masters cultivating *habitual responses*? And if they are, are their practices habitual *and* unreflective? I work through some of these questions in the next section.

### 3 Cultivation Processes in the *Zhuangzi*

A few of the *Zhuangzi*’s mastery stories highlight the extended periods of cultivation undertaken by the masters. The butcher, who greatly impresses Lord Wen Hui, has had at least nineteen years’ experience and, through time, has worked out how he should *look* (not with his eyes), when carving oxen (*Zhuangzi* 3/2–12). The swimmer in the dangerous cascades has developed skills by familiarising himself with dangerous waters (*Zhuangzi* 19/49–54). Let us look more closely at the story of the cicada catcher. As the story goes, Confucius was walking through a forest when he came across a hunchback cicada catcher, impressively catching cicadas with a pole, as if he was catching them by hand. Confucius asks the cicada-catcher, “What skill you have! Do you have *dao*?”, to which the cicada-catcher replies:

I have *dao*. For (the first) five or six months I practised with two pellets piled up (on my pole). If they don’t drop, I will lose very few cicadas. When I could balance three pellets without dropping them, I would only lose one cicada in ten. When I was able to balance five pellets without them falling off, (I could catch cicadas) as if I was picking them up with my hand. I position my body like a gnarled tree trunk and I hold my arm like an old dry branch. (*Zhuangzi* 19/17–21)

In his response to Confucius, the cicada-catcher describes the different components of his cultivation, how he has integrated them, and tracked his progress, to acquire the fluency required in skilful cicada-catching. It seems that the cicada catcher’s

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<sup>7</sup>There is another story of an artisan named Chiu, whose work is held in high regard. He did not gauge his work with standardised measures but instead actively looked for fit (*shi* 適); in this way, his craftsmanship was not shackled (*buzhi* 不桎) (*Zhuangzi* 19/62–64). His “swooping freehand acts could match the lines made with compasses and T-squares, for his fingers transformed along with the thing he was making, his mind never lingering to check or verify” (trans. Ziporyn 2009: 82).

In her discussion of the wheelwright’s story, Lisa Raphals remarks on the distinctiveness of Bian’s carving, quite different from common practices at that time (Raphals 2019).

plan was to develop habitual responses to handle his activity more efficaciously. And we would say the same of the skill stories in the *Zhuangzi* where cultivation is discussed. However, have the masters become so effective in their habitual actions that they no longer need to think about what they are doing, perhaps thence acting *unreflectively*? Details in these stories prompt questions about how we may understand the nature of agency in these performances. In philosophical debates on unreflective skilled action, various criteria have been identified as necessary components of agency, including self-awareness, reflectiveness, attention, deliberation, control, or intention (see, e.g., Dreyfus 2005; Brownstein 2014; Fridland 2017; Bermúdez 2017). In the discussion below, I consider whether and how this vocabulary may help us understand the place of cultivation in the masters' performances. The activities of the *Zhuangzi*'s masters, such as butchering, cicada-catching, swimming and wheelmaking are *ordinary*. The status of these men and the value of their activities or crafts would not have held up in comparison to those associated with official life. It is striking that stories like these, about ordinary work, were used to present a counterpoint to prevailing norms, given especially that the vast majority of extant texts from the contemporaneous period were authored by people in official life with significant social status. What were the authors of the *Zhuangzi* attempting to convey by highlighting these mostly manual tasks and, moreover, by suggesting that figures of high status such as Dukes, and Confucius, could be enlightened by them?

Indeed, these tasks may be performed in a *routine* manner; for after all, a butcher of nineteen years need hardly *reflect* on his actions in order to carve. Nevertheless, the *performances* of these masters lift these ordinary activities to great heights, prompting audiences to inquire how their actions are extraordinarily effective or fluent, or how they create marvellous products. From, this, it is clear that their performances are not *unthinking* reflex actions, performed habitually to produce cookie-cutter outcomes.

Yet, some aspects of these masters' actions are habitual. They are *habitual* in that the masters do not (have to) think about some of the actions they take, for instance, where to place one's thumb on the pole to balance it, or where along the pole the hand needs to be placed, or which part of the chisel the hammer should hit, and the like. It seems that *having to think* about such actions might even impede consideration of what is timely or fitting, including not striking too hard and causing the chisel to lodge too deeply in the wood.

In thinking about cultivation, we need to move beyond the widely-held conception of habitual actions as wooden, automatic, perhaps compulsive, and dull. Especially when we speak of the *formation* of habits, we imply there is potential to change, suggesting the idea of plasticity (Carlisle 2014: 21–4). Moreover, the point of *cultivating* habits, as the masters have done, is precisely to improve relevant *mal-leable* capacities or dispositions for particular undertakings. The relevant sense of change is captured by Carlisle:

...we can acquire habits only because we are changed by our actions and experiences. Habits develop when a repeated change, such as a movement or a sensation, makes a difference to a being's constitution. But, again, the changes that happen in habit acquisition produce an inclination to repeat, strengthen a conservative force, deepen a tendency to stay the

same. Habit does not just involve both constancy and change: it combines constancy and change. (2014: 17–18)

Highlighting the combination of constancy and change helps us appreciate the dynamic nature of cultivation in the *Zhuangzi*'s stories. It also brings out how cultivation is a personalised task in the case of the *Zhuangzi*'s masters, who have developed cultivation programs to suit their own capabilities and goals. One of the aims of cultivating habitual action is so that their performances are not hindered by their having to think about their component actions. In an interesting analysis of action and agentive control, David Papineau calls this particular difficulty "The Yips", Papineau writes: "By 'The Yips' I shall mean cases where performers become concerned about the components of the basic actions they have learned to perform automatically. As a result, they cease to execute these actions at will, and instead seek to control the components individually. They thus find themselves reduced to the level of unskilled players who have not yet acquired the ability to do those basic actions at will" (2015: 304). I believe this is one of the reasons that have prompted the masters in some of the stories to cultivate habitual component actions so that, when it comes to the performance, *occurrent* oversight of relevant component actions is not needed. The masters' self-directedness is palpable in formulating their plans; consider the way the cicada catcher had mapped out a program, progressively, to better manipulate the pole *in order that*, when catching cicadas, he may concentrate not on pole-handling but on cicada wings. Moreover, when asked to do so, the masters ably present clear, discursive accounts of their cultivation processes.<sup>8</sup> Intentionality and deliberation are present both in their designing apt procedures for developing these habits, and undertaking the training program successfully.<sup>9</sup> This is the case, even if the masters' descriptions of their training programs are not *occurrent* with their skilled performances. Contemporary debates on skill have recognised that some skilled motor action—what I have so far characterised as "habitual"—may be considered *intelligent*. For example, Ellen Fridland draws on empirical research that focuses on practice to develop motor skills (2019). Fridland presents an explanatory scheme for intelligent agentive control in terms of "chunking". On this view, cultivating skills involves combining (i.e. chunking) elements of motor action, sequentially, into larger units of behaviour. For example, in swimming, a number of elements associated with the butterfly stroke—arm strokes, dolphin kicks, head and body positions, momentum, timing and breathing—could be chunked in such a way that the swimmer need only access and control two or three

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<sup>8</sup>One exception is the story of the ferryman, who refuses to provide an answer to Yan Hui, a Confucian follower. Refer to the ferryman story in footnote 10, and a discussion regarding teaching, in footnote 24.

<sup>9</sup>This point diverges subtly in emphasis, from details set out in Papineau's account. According to Papineau, some form of intellectual control is necessary in "basic control" (what I call performance here). However, concerning *component actions* that make up basic actions, Papineau believes that "thinking explicitly" about the component actions will undermine sporting performance (2015: 297). In my view, it is *necessary* for the masters to deliberate explicitly *during the cultivation phase* and, as I will argue later, these deliberations are constitutive of Zhuangzian agency.

chunked sequences, rather than each individual element. In her extended argument, Fridland maintains that, even if such actions become automatic over time, they nevertheless maintain their cognitive characteristics.

From the discussion above, there are at least three ways the masters are consciously in control, and intelligently so. First, some masters have mapped out a complex program to cultivate skill, where each stage of attainment builds progressively on the previous one. The cicada catcher first balances two pellets on his pole, then three, then five. The idea of “chunking” explored by Fridland would provide an interesting explanatory account of the cicada catcher’s *deliberatively* building on his pole-handling skills through chunking various sequences of action elements.

Second, some of the masters engage in self-teaching, which would include self-assessment on when it is right to move to the next stage. Consider the butcher’s statement, for example, that “When I began carving oxen, I looked at nothing but oxen. Yet, even after three years, I could not see the entire ox. But now, I encounter it with my spirit; not seeing it with my eyes. My sensory capacities for knowledge cease to work, and my spirit guides my actions.” (*Zhuangzi* 3/4–11). The butcher’s evaluation of where his skills are at, at particular points in time, is especially important in demonstrating his higher-order reflective awareness of his capabilities for skilled action. (We can also see how more complex chunking processes, that build on previous “chunks”, may be instrumental in his progressive building-up of skills).

Agentive control is present, thirdly, in some of the masters’ *recognising* that it is important for them to perform some of the composite actions automatically, so that they may attend to the more intricate components of the activity. Indeed, it seems that the exceptional nature of the feats they perform is augmented by—perhaps made possible by—their having successfully chunked elements of action into, say, *automatic* pole-handling behaviours and chiselling behaviours, so that cicadas can be caught, and wheels can be chiselled, skilfully. In the next section, I explore how an ability to perform some component actions habitually and unreflectively, contributes to skilful execution of an activity.

## 4 Habit, Forgetting and Attentiveness

In some stories, the masters need to forget some aspects of their activity so that they can be more attentive to other salient variables that are perhaps more unpredictable or unwieldy.

- The cicada-catcher needs to ensure that he is “aware of nothing but cicada wings. Neither turning nor leaning, I do not let the ten thousand things take the place of cicada wings” (*Zhuangzi* 19/19–21).
- Engraver Qing, who makes wonderful bellstands, fasts for seven days. He says that, after fasting, “I *forget* I have four limbs or a body,” so that “[m]y skill is concentrated and the outside world slides away” (*Zhuangzi* 19/57–58; trans. Ziporyn 2009: 82; emphasis mine).

- The swimmer at the foot of the dangerous cascades says, “I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies, following the *dao* of the waters without thinking about the self” (*Zhuangzi* 19/51–4).

The aspect of performance I wish to emphasise here is the masters’ absorption in components of their activities, as well as the conditions conducive to skilled performance. Working through the examples above, the cicada catcher’s words seem least complicated: he is careful to focus on the *wings* of cicadas, as it is the wings that the sticky adhesive on his pole attaches to. He ensures that he is not distracted by the “ten thousand things”—the world around him—so that he focuses on this more unpredictable aspect of the activity. The cicada catcher’s awareness of his control of the pole may not be occurrent with his cicada-catching activity. But this is not the point. Rather, it is critical that his awareness of how he should manipulate the pole is *not present* when he is catching cicadas, if he is to catch cicadas *skilfully*, as if he were grabbing them with his hands. Notably, across the skill stories, *none* of the masters speak during their performances; this I take to be indicative of their absorption in their activity.

Fasting is an important preparatory activity for engraver Qing (*Zhuangzi* 19/54–59). In the story, Qing, who makes wonderful bellstands, fasts for a period before he enters the forest to select trees that are suitable for bellstands. If none are suitable, he does not persist. The *point* of fasting, we are told, is so that he forgets the physical aspects of his body so as to concentrate his skill. Not unlike the cicada catcher, in Qing’s description of his performance, he is intensely self-aware of the different levels of attainment he is able to achieve. Although he is not *cultivating* skill as such, Qing explains how he progresses in his development of the right state of mind so that he can expertly select trees for bellstands: after three days of fasting, he does not care about “praise or reward, rank or salary” (trans. Ziporyn 2009: 82). After five, he does not care about “honor and disgrace, skill and clumsiness” (*ibid.*) And, after seven, he gets to where he needs to be for selecting a tree fit for making magnificent bellstands from. This story raises interesting questions about agentive motor control for, at one level, “forgetting” four limbs and body suggests that Qing might be relinquishing control. Yet, it is quite clear that he undertakes fasting, *intentionally*, to get to this state of “forgetting”. The sense of “forgetting” here has an enabling rather than relinquishing component.<sup>10</sup>

Of the three stories above, the swimmer’s comments on self-awareness and control are most intriguing as he attempts *not* to think about the self. In the story,

<sup>10</sup>The idea of forgetting in this story is relevantly similar to that of an expert ferryman, who Yan Yuan, a Confucian follower, is keen to learn from (*Zhuangzi* 19/22–26). In discussing this encounter with Confucius, Yan Yuan tells Confucius how the ferryman says to Yan Yuan that good swimmers are well equipped to become experts at ferrying, but refused to elaborate further. Confucius then takes on the role of the teacher to explain the connection between good swimmers and good ferrymen to Yan Yuan, saying that good swimmers “forget the water”. This is not about “being oblivious to or unheedingful of the water”, as Chris Fraser explains. Rather, the ‘forgetting’ is realised practically in that good swimmers “don’t attend to [the water] as a source of anxiety. Worries about it don’t enter their mind.” (Fraser 2019: 165–6).

Confucius and his followers encounter the man jumping into the water at the base of the cascades. Confucius fears for the swimmer's life, thinking that he might have been attempting suicide. Later, upon realising the swimmer was only going for a swim, Confucius seeks eagerly to learn from him. The swimmer says that his mastery has resulted from long term engagement and familiarisation with his surrounds. This story is fascinating because, on the one hand, it seems especially counterintuitive that a swimmer should aim to forget himself, as swimming strokes are of course central to swimming. On the other, these dangerous waters at the foot of the cascades are treacherous and *therefore* to plan strokes against those strong currents would very likely put the swimmer in danger. And this is perhaps what the swimmer has learnt over the years as he has familiarised himself with the waters here. This explanation gives the story an interesting twist, whereby the swimmer is *in control* by *not* thinking about the self.

The idea of not thinking about the self generates some interest about the nature of agency. David Velleman has observed that some of the *Zhuangzi*'s stories suggest that the kind of forgetfulness in question is *necessary* for spontaneous action (Velleman 2008: 184). Velleman holds this in contrast to a view that takes reflective awareness as the distinguishing feature of human personhood. He characterises reflective awareness in terms set out by Harry Frankfurt (1988), as the freedom of will to desire what motivates oneself. Velleman problematises what he understands to be Frankfurt's view of agency, as being overly tied up with higher-order reflectiveness. He criticises this view on the basis that it requires that a person detach herself from her motives, in order to reflect on them.<sup>11</sup> Velleman offers an account of agency that avoids such detachment, describing consummate agency as "becoming so engrossed in an activity that we stop reflecting and lose ourselves" (*ibid.*: 182). According to him, this picture of "higher wantonness" characterises many of the *Zhuangzi*'s masters, for whom self regulation is unnecessary (but which can be called upon when needed), because their skill has attained great heights. I am mindful that Velleman's account focuses primarily on the notion of agency *qua* what goes on (or not) in the head, so to speak, and possibly at the expense of the stories' focus on the actions and performances of the masters. Although Velleman's "higher wantonness" accommodates both unreflective action and attentiveness, it does not situate these aspects of skilled performance, as the text does, within its discussion of cultivation. For example, the cicada catcher's habitual actions with his pole, triggered and sustained by the characteristic conditions of cicada-catching, free up his

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<sup>11</sup> Velleman states that, according to the account of agency *qua* reflectiveness on one's own motives, "we are distanced—or, as I put it, dis-identified—from our motive by reflective consciousness itself. The more conscious we become of a motive, the more it becomes the object of our thoughts, and the more it becomes the object of our thought, the less we think from the perspective of its subject and the less we think from the perspective of the motive's subject, the less engrossed we are in the activities that it motivates." (2008: 180).

sensory and cognitive capacities to focus more intensely on more unpredictable variables such as, perhaps, cicada habits in more humid conditions.<sup>12</sup>

I propose that, in the *Zhuangzi*, unreflective habitual actions and attentiveness are not two separate events, but aspects of the same performance. I defend this claim with reference to the cultivation processes in the *Zhuangzi*, that *both* habitual actions *and* attentiveness are developed simultaneously. The following section sets out support for this claim.

## 5 Cultivation and Responsiveness

The aims of cultivation in the *Zhuangzi* are to develop the masters' capacities to act responsively to the situational demands of their respective tasks. Their expertise lies in their actions, executed fluently and in response to the circumstances salient to the activity. The different elements of the performances are not discontinuous events but aptly integrated *in performance* (and in cultivation, as alluded to earlier). Repeated, iterative practice helps a person develop habitual responses *as well as* sensitivity to the triggers of these actions, including how some salient triggers may vary across situations.

To explore the nature of cultivation in the *Zhuangzi*, I first engage with a discussion on habit that highlights its connection to agent-awareness and agency. I then examine the question of context-sensitivity to understand how cultivation can help prepare a person to handle an activity across varying situations (e.g. different oxen, cicadas, trees, water currents). Third, I relate these considerations of cultivation to the theme of responsiveness in the *Zhuangzi*.

First, one of the characteristic features of habitual action is that a person's encounter with the relevant triggers—a regular state of affairs within which the habit was acquired—is sufficient to “initiate and sustain the exercise of the habit” (Pollard 2010: 78). Concerning habits, as a person's actions become more automatic through time, there may be a “dulling” effect, of our becoming less self-aware, and less in control, of our habitual actions.<sup>13,14</sup> This is true of both habitual actions

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<sup>12</sup> Pollard describes the interdependence of the dulling effect, and awareness, as follows: “Whilst habituation involves a dulling of our awareness of some things, it may also *enhance* our awareness of other things... We achieve an enhanced awareness of what is unusual, or perhaps unique, about the present situation. Most obviously, one is immediately sensitive to factors which make the usual exercise of the habit difficult or impossible. Less obviously, we become more sensitive to subtle differences in what we are engaging with and adjust to these differences, as the guitarist adjusts his hands to the shape of a new guitar” (*ibid.*)

<sup>13</sup> Pollard writes “The awareness the agent may have had of sensations which accompanied the actions at the acquisition stage fade, so the agent's awareness of performing the action diminishes... this ‘dulling’ effect of repetition is the familiar process of become ‘accustomed’ or ‘used’ to things we regularly encounter. We stop noticing the things we are most familiar with.” (2010:78)

<sup>14</sup> Fraser's account of RDRDs also emphasise this aspect of habitual actions: “The conscious experience of autonomy in the form of decision-making may play little or no role in virtuoso perfor-



developed without our being consciously aware of it happening—such as the posture we adopt as we sit at our computers—as well as those we have intentionally developed, such as pole-, or hammer and chisel-, or knife-manipulation. If we develop habitual actions in the latter sense, that is, in a deliberative and self-conscious way as the masters do, it is likely that we will become increasingly aware of the conditions that “characteristically go with the habit in question.” (*ibid.*)

It would seem, too, that the differences between the two types of habit covered above are not sharply distinguished but run along a continuum. Particularly with the deliberate cultivation of habitual actions, the “dulling” effect of habits does not necessarily cast an agent into a state of passivity. A person who sets out to develop habitual behaviour in response to a set of conditions will typically engage in habit-formation *actively*, observing the situational circumstances that, together, *are* the context for the habitual behaviour (Pollard, *ibid*; Carlisle 2014: 71–112). For example, insofar as the cicada catcher positions his body like a gnarled tree trunk and his arm like an old dry branch *in the cicada catching context*, he is also actively engaging with cicada habits and habitats, in order to develop appropriate habitual responses. These habits would have been actively cultivated alongside his increasingly sharpened observations of cicada behaviours in their environments, such as what kinds of movements might scare them off.

This takes us to the second point, about cultivation and context-sensitivity. For the *Zhuangzi*’s masters, developing skills in body positioning, or control of the pole, the knife, or the hammer and chisel, are only part of the picture. The masters are, *simultaneously*, refining their sensitivity to the relevant contexts of their activity. In contrast to habits acquired unselfconsciously, carefully planned cultivation also helps enhance an individual’s grasp of the scope and limitations of habitual action. To illustrate these points, consider Butcher Ding’s account. He wields his knife expertly, well beyond the skill of good cooks who slice, not to mention of ordinary cooks, who hack. But it is not merely in his knife-wielding skills that his expertise lies. Incredibly, Butcher Ding has never had to sharpen his knife after nineteen years, because, as he says,

my knife has never had to cut through the knotted nodes where the warp hits the weave, much less the gnarled joints of bone...For the joints have spaces within them, and the very edge of the blade has no thickness at all. When what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play of the blade. (*Zhuangzi* 3/4–11; trans. Ziporyn 2009: 22).

Over and above what good cooks do, Butcher Ding *sees* no longer with his eyes, as noted earlier. After all, eyesight cannot provide him with information on where the spaces are between the joints. He claims that he proceeds with his spirit (*shen* 神), being guided by the natural patterns (*yi fu tian li* 依乎天理) of the ox. An understanding of these nuances, specifically, of where the spaces are between the joints,

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mance. Indeed, the virtuoso may sometimes experience her actions as triggered directly and automatically by events in the environment, such as the conductor’s cue, rather than by any conscious decision of her own.” (2009: 231)

of each ox, may only be acquired through practice. In other words, with repeated practice, an attentive learner will become increasingly aware of the characteristic conditions relating to specific habitual behaviours. Likewise, he should also develop a sense of what is salient to the activity and, of those, which among them are more stable or more unpredictable across situations. In addition to the knife-wielding skills of a good cook, the acuity of Butcher Ding's perception of the natural patterns—of where the spaces are between the joints—is what makes him *more* than just dextrous.<sup>15</sup> *Where* to look, *what* to look for, and *what* capacities to look with, are key features of the masters' attentiveness. For this reason, the butcher knows to discern the space between the joints, just as the cicada catcher looks *only* at cicada wings<sup>16</sup> as these are the (more) unpredictable elements of their respective activities. A person does not acquire a sense of these *salient*, more unpredictable conditions through theorising, but in practice. Only deliberative, extensive practice will reveal *what more* needs to be accomplished for skilful action. In gaining a sense of the regular patterns of an activity, a person will at the same time acquire a sense of what might be more episodic or variable, yet salient. It seems that the *Zhuangzi*'s masters have cultivated their skills to get the balance between habitual action and attentiveness right. Their success is a result of their sensitivity and responsiveness to the demands of the situation, *enacted* effectively and fluently in actions.<sup>17,18</sup>

Responsiveness is the third point I wish to focus on in this section. I propose that, in the *Zhuangzi*, *responsiveness* (ying 應) is a manifestation of the fruits of

<sup>15</sup> In response to King Hui of Liang, who admirably asks about his dexterity, Butcher Ding replies, saying “What I am devoted to is *dao*, which exceeds dexterity (*ji* 技)”. Dan Robins has presented an interesting argument on the interpretation of *dao* as being “beyond skill” (2011).

<sup>16</sup> The characteristic conditions of cicada catching might include awareness of cicada aversion to sudden movements, for example. In response to more consistent cicada habits such as aversion to sudden movements, the *Zhuangzi*'s cicada catcher holds his body and arm, and manipulates his pole, fittingly. His responses to these more regular circumstances of cicada catching may be performed *unreflectively*. However, in his being aware of the more regular aspects of cicada catching, he will at the same time acquire a sense of the *irregular* aspects, such as cicada wings, as the latter may indicate the fluctuations he needs to attend to, there and then.

<sup>17</sup> Mercedes Valmisa offers a unique approach to understanding Chinese philosophy of action, identifying its key feature as “adapting”. Valmisa highlights the situation-sensitive nature of action in classical Chinese texts, noting the embeddedness of our actions and the need to develop skills to respond efficaciously: “Chinese discourses on adapting shaped an exceptional philosophy of action that asked the person to constantly adjust to varying circumstances in order to better respond to the manifold situations humans confront in a lifetime, including during the transformations due to bodily change, sickness, and death. Overall, the adaptive person is a situational, contextual, reflexive, flexible, and creative agent capable of designing strategies *ad hoc*: unique and transient courses of action for specific, nonpermanent, and nongeneralizable life problems.” (2021: 5).

<sup>18</sup> The idea that training helps us to develop sensitivity to situational similarities and differences is by no means distinctive to the *Zhuangzi* or the Chinese tradition. For example, in his discussion of how we may understand virtue in an Aristotelian conception of ethics, John McDowell discusses an important characteristic of the virtuous person, that is, his sensitivity to the *relevant* demands of the situation (1998: 53; 64). According to Erik Rietveld, McDowell's emphasis on “situation-specific discernment” is very similar to “Dreyfus' Merleau-Pontian ideas on sensitivity to relevance in the situation.” (Rietveld 2010: 190).

cultivation. An effectually responsive person is one who has successfully realised habitual actions and attentiveness in performance. Although only one mastery story, that of wheelwright Bian, explicitly refers to the term *ying*, all masterly performances in the text have this quality. Instead of using the standard measuring instruments, Bian feels with his hand, and *responds* (*ying*) with his heart-mind.

It is appropriate at this point to take a slight diversion to focus on the exchange between the wheelwright and Duke Huan. This will help bring out the importance of responsiveness in the *Zhuangzi*, as part of its contribution to debates in its time. As we have already noted, the wheelwright far too boldly disparages the Duke's reading in the hall above. In the story, the Duke's treasured words of sages are rudely characterised by wheelwright Bian as "the chaff and dregs of the men of old" (trans. Watson 1968: 152–3), and contrasted to the responsiveness of the wheelwright. The sages' words about how best to live may be analogised to the compass and square: they were fixed standards for calibrating and measuring actions. In contrast to the wheelwright's responsiveness in his chiselling, the Duke's reliance on the *words* from the past did not engender sensitivity to situational particularities. How could a person whose role is to lead and enrich humanity, do so unresponsively, being primarily guided by standards? In the text more generally, *ying* is a feature of sagely insight, capturing the ability of the sage to respond flexibly to different scenarios and positions (*Zhuangzi* 2/27–31).<sup>19</sup> One passage uses an analogy, effectively to demonstrate the operation of *ying*:

Nothing is as good as a boat for crossing water, nothing as good as a cart for crossing land. But though a boat will get you over water, if you try to push it across land, you may push till your dying day and hardly move it any distance at all. And are the past and present not like the water and the land, and the states of [Zhou] and Lu not like a boat and a cart? To attempt to implement the ways of [Zhou] in the state of Lu is like trying to push a boat over land—a great deal of work, no success, and certain danger to the person who tries it. The man who tries to do so does not understand the transmission (of tradition) that is without direction, that responds [*ying* 應] to things limitlessly (*Zhuangzi* 14/35–8; adapted from Watson 1968: 159–60)

This passage underscores the importance of responsiveness to situational contingencies. In the discussion above, I have emphasised that it is critical for the masters to cultivate responsiveness, which in turn is comprised by enacting relevant habitual actions while being attentive to salient circumstantial variations.<sup>20</sup> The *Zhuangzi*'s

<sup>19</sup> For this reason and others to follow, I disagree with Fraser's characterisation of *ying* as "norm-governed response" in the following terms: "The structure of action comprises a discrimination (*bian*) that prompts a norm-governed response (*ying* 應) to its object" (2009: 227). I am aware that Fraser says this of Chinese philosophy generally. However, in my view, this is not as applicable, or perhaps even not applicable, to the *Zhuangzi*.

<sup>20</sup> What I do not touch on in this discussion is the question of an agent's picking out what is salient. This is relevant to the comment I made earlier, "Where to look, what to look for, and what capacities to look with, are key features of the masters' attentiveness." The stories assume that a person's sense of salience develops as they become more attuned, through cultivation, to the *in situ* training of habitual responses. Yet, the question remains, as articulated by Rietveld and Kiverstein, of "What makes it the case then that a skilled individual is solicited by one affordance rather than

stories do not provide sufficient detail for us to understand the precise nature of the connections between habitual action and attentiveness. Yet, we get the impression that the masters' execution of actions is apt, fluent and efficacious—and even performed with enjoyment—as in the case of Butcher Ding:

At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee—zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the [Jing Shou] music (*Zhuangzi* 3/2–12; trans. Watson 1968: 50–1).

How does butcher Ding carve ox after ox, his knife moving between the joints of each ox? The key to success in different situations (for the butcher, this involves different oxen) lies in his responsiveness. As he says of his encounters with each ox, “[m]y sensory capacities for knowledge cease to work, and my spirit guides my actions” (*Zhuangzi* 3/4–11). Butcher Ding's responsiveness is not disrupted by considerations of how he should perform. And we have seen the same in Sect. 3, of his colleagues in the *Zhuangzi* who likewise need to “forget” certain aspects of their performance. How does the butcher, and others, execute their activities in response to situational variations, yet not be hampered by their considerations of how best to respond? One way to express this problem is offered by Bermúdez, who discusses the question of agent control during performance:

Automaticity is thus necessary for skill. But it does not seem to be sufficient, because not all acquired automatic associations would qualify as skills (e.g., those that constitute implicit biases or mere associations between ideas). What else does skill need, then? At least an element of control is required, to unite automatic routines into a coherent performance and perform online performance corrections and adjustments. Skilled agents are able to fine-tune each of their body movements to the particular situation, direct their attention to exactly the relevant features, and make multiple precise corrections on the fly. (2017: 901)

The issue, Bermúdez suggests, concerns what kinds of (cognitive) processes underlie this control. (I note here that parsing the question this way would lead us to overlook what is happening in the *Zhuangzi*; I will return to this shortly). According to Bermúdez, there is a split in the debate between intellectualists, who hold that agential oversight is required for expertise, whereas anti-intellectualists claim that such control could contribute to problems of “choking” (*ibid.*: 901–2). “Choking” refers broadly to a person's being distracted while performing, thus performing poorly. Unlike the case of the “yips” described earlier (relating to distraction from having to think about how to enact particular actions), in choking, distraction arises from the pressures of competition, for example.<sup>21</sup> Both Bermúdez and Papineau

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another in a way that fits with the individual's concerns on a given occasion?” (2014: 340). Rietveld and Kiverstein here engage with the debates in the field of ecological psychology, that focus on an agent's embodied engagement with the environment, which *affords* opportunities as well as constraints. Refer to Lai (2019) for a discussion of how debates on embodied knowledge can help us better understand the cicada catcher story.

<sup>21</sup> Papineau's description of choking in sporting performance is helpful: “By ‘Choking’ I shall mean a loss of focus caused by the pressure of some competitive situation, leading to the player

offer solutions that traverse the intellectualist/anti-intellectualist divide, with Bermúdez seeking some middle ground and Papineau adapting elements of each position to fill out a picture of performance.<sup>22</sup> While it is not the place to adjudicate the debate here, I note that both accounts work within a framework that draws a line between (intellectual) agentive control, on the one hand, and motor action, on the other. And this is not a framework the *Zhuangzi* subscribes to, in its account of responsiveness. In the *Zhuangzi*, responsiveness can only be fully understood *as an outcome* of the cultivation process. The masters' entire being is engaged in cultivation and performance. And, because this is so, questions about where mental control begins, and where motor actions end, cannot be separated. The text discusses performance in a way that does not assume a mind-body framework within which the mind (or mental states) is the control centre that issues orders to the body. The stories' focus on cultivation draws our attention to composite actions and fitting responses, that involve both body and mind. It is therefore unsurprising that the stories do not necessarily articulate the processes associated with each, in the way some Anglophone philosophers might expect. From this angle, Fraser's "discrimination-and-response" model *also* remains lodged within a framing that suggests a "discriminating" *mind* is first engaged, followed by the actions of a "responding" *body*. In the final section below, I bring together the themes of cultivation and responsiveness to reflect on the nature of Zhuangzian agency.

## 6 Agency and Performance

I have so far established that elements of agentive experience are presented in the stories. These include: the masters' detailed descriptions of their cultivation processes; their development of programs to acquire capacities for fluent, habitual responses to circumstances; how they track their own progress; and how they attune their attentiveness to focus on unpredictable, yet salient, conditions pertaining to their activity. One important reason for their developing habitual responses is so that relevant states of affairs may trigger and sustain these actions, freeing up their attentive capacities to engage with the more unstable components, such as cicada wings. A second important purpose of cultivation lies in its iterative process that, when approached reflectively, helps familiarise the masters with what is *salient* with respect to a particular activity. As I proposed in the previous section, the effective

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performing at a significantly lower level than normal. In the most egregious cases, the performer is expected to do well, or perhaps is even closing in on victory, but is unnerved by the magnitude of the occasion, and as a result starts to play poorly." (2015: 304)

<sup>22</sup>Papineau proposes that, in skilful performances, an agent should both *not* think about component actions but at the same time maintain intentional control of that basic action (2015). Bermúdez argues for an "attention-control" account, which holds that control is not necessary for many component actions, but nevertheless sustained attention control is necessary for an agent's dealing flexibly with situations (2014).

interplay of these components is crystallised in the *Zhuangzi*'s idea of responsiveness. Here, I fill out one more aspect of responsiveness before turning to consider questions of agency.

When we speak of responsiveness, there is an underlying suggestion of a state of affairs a person responds to. What are the masters responding to, in their performances? What are they aiming to achieve? Here, there is a variety of goals: crafting wheels, catching cicadas, carving oxen, swimming and ferrying, to name a few. In light of these respective goals, the masters' composite actions, including how they use their chisel and hammer, their pole, and their knife—their manoeuvrings—are, of themselves, not telic in the way their performances might be. In the stories, the masters' composite actions must align with what is available, *there*, in that situation. For example, making wonderful bellstands begins with sourcing wood that can be turned into beautiful bellstands. An important feature of engraver Qing's account is that he does not merely pillage the forests in line with his goals. In fact, in order to achieve his goal of creating wonderful bellstands, he *must* work with what is "there," in the world:

My body arrives at a certain spot [in the forest], and already I see the completed bell stand there; only then do I apply my hand to it. Otherwise I leave the tree alone. (*Zhuangzi* 19/54–9; trans. Ziporyn 2009: 82; annotations by author)

The focal point here is that Qing's success lies in part in the *fit* of his actions, with the world. His skilfulness in making bellstands involves his *only* taking actions (i.e. acquiring a tree to make a bellstand with) that are aligned with the nature of the tree. We find similar emphases on the masters' responses being *fitting* in other stories. The cicada catcher needs to align his posture and arm position with cicada habitats. He may be able to catch some cicadas without taking these positions although, as the story goes, he would have been less effective. Perhaps most striking among the stories in this regard is the swimmer's having no *dao* as he goes under with the swirls and emerges with the eddies. From these considerations, the masters' skilfulness is partly undergirded by their being attuned to their contexts of activity. That their actions need to be fitting, across different instantiations of their activity, helps us understand why responsiveness is an important feature of performance, and of agency. These intricate details of habit and its place in skilled action, as well as the centrality of responsiveness in performance, are not accounted for in Velleman's account of "higher wantonness". As Velleman's focus is on the masters' losing of the self as the distinctive feature of Zhuangzian agency, the stories' details about component habitual actions, cultivation, responsiveness, and fit, may be easily overlooked. In contrast, in the account offered here, that takes cues from the performances of the masters, we get a thicker conception of Zhuangzian agency.

Responsive actions—actions carried out fittingly—are constitutive components of skilled performance. A prominent theme across many of the skill stories is that such responsiveness *can* be trained. The stories are not only forward-looking in the way they celebrate the skilled performances. They also present a longitudinal picture of agency that highlights a range of different agentive experiences across a period of time, noted in our discussions above. The stories offer a picture of agency

that is neither primarily focused on the performer's successes in achieving targeted outcomes nor temporally restricted to his awareness, intentionality or control at the moment of action. (And this longitudinal picture is also not part of Velleman's account of agency).<sup>23</sup>

The focus on responsiveness also foregrounds how Zhuangzian agency is embodied uniquely, in the personal experiences of each of the masters. Agency in the *Zhuangzi* is primarily personal and non-generalisable. When the masters are called upon to give an account of how they have acquired mastery, they give *personalised* narratives of their cultivation processes. We have already seen, for example, how the embodied skills of wheelmaker Bian cannot be imparted to his son. Consider, too, the cicada catcher's recount of his arduous work balancing pellets on his pole. He builds on his own progress by attuning himself to the cicada's environment, according to his personalised learning trajectory. A factor that contributes to some of these unique accounts of agency is the *embodied* nature of performance. The masters' performances, embodied and personal, can neither be generalised nor conceived of in abstraction. Let me illustrate with the story of the cicada catcher as the detail of his hunched back could easily pass unnoticed. Are there deeper, perhaps causal, connections between his hunchback and his cicada-catching skills? Has his back *become* hunched, through being contorted over the years of cicada-catching? Or is he a skilled cicada catcher *because* he is a hunchback, which makes him suited to mastery of this activity? We are not told in this story, though each explanation raises intriguing questions about the nature of his *embodied* agency.

The account of agency I present here differs in one significant way from Fraser's. To some extent, Fraser's account recognises an agent's ownership of his performance. However, in order to distinguish Chinese philosophy's conception of agency from those in Anglophone philosophy based primarily on deliberation or decision-making, Fraser argues that the latter tend to be more individualistic:

Conceptions of agency that tie it to the agent's capacity to deliberate and decide what to do tend to be highly individualistic. To exercise agency is to make up one's own mind on the basis of reasons one affirms for oneself and then to act on one's decisions. (2009: 231)

And, by contrast, the relevant conception of agency in Chinese philosophy incorporates a view of autonomy that is not as "individualistic":

The performance of skills, rituals, and other practices is not individualistic in this way. These sorts of activities also manifest autonomy, but differently. They do not focus on the decision-making processes of the individual agent. In performing a skill, such as speaking

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<sup>23</sup> Papineau's account also does not incorporate the conception of agency from a longitudinal perspective. In order to succeed in a move in sport, say, an agent should both *not* think about component actions but at the same time maintain intentional control of that basic move (action). This account remains committed to the terms of the habitualist-intellectualist debate, even though it criticises each position. By contrast, my account looks at agency across time, including during the preparatory stages of cultivation to improve one's performance. My account of agency that involves embodied intelligent action also muddies the waters concerning the thinking-self/motor-action dichotomy.



a language, we must follow norms that do not depend on our decisions. Nevertheless, the performance is our own...we can develop our own style of performance. (*ibid.*)

Although I agree with Fraser that the masters may develop their own *styles* of performance, I believe that Zhuangzian agency is individualistic in a more significant way. On my view, this is primarily because a person's entire being—including their physiological form, where appropriate—is involved, responsively, in their contexts of performance. For the masters, agency is unique and not reproducible by others. Let me conclude this section by returning to the cicada catcher story. *Curiously*, after the cicada catcher has explained how *he* has acquired *his* skill, Confucius turns to his followers to impart the following words of wisdom: "An undivided will and a concentrated spirit—this may be said of this hunchbacked gentleman!" (*Zhuangzi* 19/17–21). Confucius attempts to *teach* his followers, through verbal instruction, the secrets of the cicada catcher's success. But is skill *teachable*, in words? Noticeably, although teachers are mentioned in the *Zhuangzi*, no teachers figure in the skill stories.<sup>24</sup> There is one glaring difference between the cicada catcher's and Confucius' words: the cicada catcher's *many* comments on his actions and progress in cultivation have been reduced to a single phrase when Confucius instructs his followers. The second and more significant gap is that, whereas the cicada catcher presents his *personal* account of skill (as a manifestation of his unique agency), Confucius attempts to generalise the account for his followers. Are these prescriptions appropriate or sufficient for those who are not hunchbacks?

## 7 Conclusion

In this discussion, I have presented an account of agency embedded in some of the *Zhuangzi*'s stories of mastery. Through the lens of performance, I have opened up avenues for understanding agency in the *Zhuangzi* in terms of action, habit, attentiveness, responsiveness and cultivation. Agency in the *Zhuangzi* is personalised, enacted, embodied, and engaged in performance. The performances of the masters are far from merely habitual even though they seem automatic. There is one more feature of Zhuangzian agency which I would like to mention in closing. Scholarly literature typically emphasises the impressive skills of the masters, with little

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<sup>24</sup> In the stories where the masters are asked about their performance, there is *not* one mention of a teacher. The masters articulate the methods they have taken to cultivate skill. The lack of mention of teachers is remarkable. It is also worth keeping in mind the question of whether the masters intended to *teach* their respective audiences, as their recounts are marked by specific, *firsthand* accounts of skill acquisition. That their accounts are markedly their own is signified by their use of self-referencing pronouns, (*wo* 我; *wu* 吾, and the diminutive *chen* 臣). *Interestingly*, Confucius, who figures in some of these stories (e.g. cicada catcher, swimmer), turns to his followers to further instil the wisdom imparted by these masters! These observations are further supported by the theme of "wordless teaching" which occurs in a passage where Confucius seeks to be taught by Wang Tai, a cripple who instructs without words (不言之教, *bu yan zhi jiao*; *Zhuangzi* 5/2).

attention paid to how, on being *personally* involved in their activities, the masters are also exposed to failure. Chisels and knives could slip, or only a few cicadas caught. This risk of failure is greater than if the masters were carving wood with compass and square, or swimming in still waters. In the swimmer's case, the risk is significant—he could lose his life! This element of risk is one of the distinguishing features of skill, as the master puts himself on the line. In other words, insofar as the masters move beyond conventional methods to perform skilfully, they also take on risks. Consider the wheelwright who, if he were to use compass and square, would probably succeed in making a reasonably functional wheel. But, in carving free-hand, he could fail, inasmuch as he could excel.

In the *Zhuangzi*'s account of mastery, and of agency, there is no one-size-fits-all method of handling affairs. Yet, optimistically, there are opportunities for us to cultivate activity-relevant habitual component actions that enable us to attend responsively to situational contingencies. It is this sustained picture of agency, from cultivation through to performance, that helps us better understand the possibilities of human achievement.

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# Chapter 29

## Neuroscientific and Cognitive Perspectives on the *Zhuangzi*



Lisa Raphals

### 1 Introduction

In recent years there has been considerable interest in the extent to which some key insights of neuroscience and cognitive science reinforce – or are claimed to do – some of the key teachings of Chinese philosophy. Much of this discussion centers on the teaching of Confucian ethics.<sup>1</sup>

But some of the same insights apply equally well to the *Zhuangzi*, with potentially different implications than they offer for Confucian ethics and political philosophy. I consider perspectives on the *Zhuangzi* offered by neuroscience and cognitive science under three inter-related headings.

The first is the nature of the self. The *Zhuangzi* famously questions the unity or reality of perceptions of selfhood and identity. Neuroscience and cognitive science also increasingly teach us that the self is not a fixed entity but a dynamic process of relationships. A second closely related perspective is the nature of embodied cognition. A third rubric are what appear to be meditation techniques described in the *Zhuangzi*.

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<sup>1</sup>Slingerland 2010, 2011; Reber and Slingerland 2011. This paper was prepared in 2018, and thus does not cite several important studies that have appeared in the interim.

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## 2 Self in the *Zhuangzi*

In recent years, a mass of scholarship has addressed the question of the self in Chinese philosophy in general, and in the *Zhuangzi* in particular. Those discussions have largely focused on several themes: (1) “relational” selves, claims that Chinese selves are construed in relation to a larger group, usually the family; (2) the question of individualism and its presence or absence; (3) metaphors for the self; and more recently, considerations of mind-body dualism.<sup>2</sup>

The *Zhuangzi* is well known for problematizing notions of a unitary or constant “self.”<sup>3</sup> To give a brief version of a much longer discussion, this is done in three ways. First are accounts of individuals who have forgotten or lost their “selves.” At the beginning of Chapter 2, Nanguo Ziqi 南郭子綦 awakes from a kind of trance, as if absent (*da yan* 荅焉) and seems to have lost (*si sang* 似喪) his “counterpart” (*qi ou* 其耦), a term that refers to one of a pair (2: 43).<sup>4</sup> His companion responds by asking:

形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎？今之隱机者，非昔之隱机者也。

Can the body be made like withered wood, and the mind be made like dead ashes? The one who now is leaning on the bench is not the one who leaned on the bench previously. (*Zhuangzi* 2: 43)

And Nanguo Ziqi replies that “just now I lost myself” (*jin zhe wu sang wo* 今者吾喪我, 2: 45). Second, the *Zhuangzi* advocates a state of “emptiness” (*xu* 虛), which it links to loss of self-perception. The key passage occurs in chapter 4, where Confucius instructs his student Yan Hui in the art of “heart-fasting” (*xin zhai* 心齋, discussed in detail below), in which Yan Hui’s conventional self-perception disappears, in favor of – not no self – but an “empty” self that is able to perceive widely and act with virtuosity.

Third, heart-fasting and emptiness are linked to “wandering” of the heart-mind (discussed further below).<sup>5</sup>

Here I take the slightly different approach of a body-centered definition, namely the identification of what is and is not “oneself,” starting with how one literally identifies one’s body parts as one’s own, and moving outward to more subtle notions of self-other boundaries. I argue that the *Zhuangzi* both problematizes and accepts such boundaries. For ease of discussion I group these passages into three headings: (1) “forgetting” or “losing” one’s entire “self” (*ji* 己) or one’s physical person (*shen*

<sup>2</sup>For relational selves see Hall and Ames 1998, esp. (For a broader review of the concept see Anderson and Chen 2002.) For individualism see in particular Brindley 2010 and Hansen 1985. For metaphors see Chong 2007 and Slingerland 2004. For mind-body dualism see Elvin 1985, Goldin 2003, Raphals 2018a, Slingerland 2013, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>For discussion of this issue see Fraser 2008, Jochim 1998 and Machek 2016.

<sup>4</sup>References to the *Zhuangzi* are from *Zhuangzi jishi* (1961) 莊子集釋. Translations are based on Graham 1981 (henceforward G) and Mair 1994 (henceforward M). Mair (M10) translates this passage somewhat misleadingly as: “Disembodied, he seemed bereft of soul.”

<sup>5</sup>For discussion of these passages see Fraser 2008 and 2014, Jochim 1998: esp. 50–56.

身); (2) forgetting or being unaware of a part of one's body; (3) not noticing the absence of a part of one's body.

## 2.1 *Losing Oneself*

The rhetoric of the *Zhuangzi* repeatedly problematizes the physical person, in two ways. One strategy is to valorize individuals who are in some sense physically incomplete. (Examples of such “incomplete persons” are described in the next section.) Another is to portray fully realized individuals whose boundaries in some real sense extend beyond their physical persons (“super-complete persons”); these “ultimate” or perfected persons are described as “having no self (*zhi ren wu ji* 至人无己, 1: 16).<sup>6</sup> For example, chapter 2 describes an “ultimate person” (*zhi ren* 至人) who is untouched by heat or cold and on whom death and life have no effect (*si sheng wu bian yu ji* 死生无變於己, 2: 96, M21).

In some cases forgetting the whole self is linked with deliberately letting the heart-mind wander. For example, in a discussion between Confucius and Laozi, Confucius remarks that Laozi had been in a state in which his “form and body” (*xing ti* 形體) seemed stiff as as an old dead tree:

似遺物離人而立於獨也。」老聃曰：「吾遊心於物之初。

You seemed to have left things behind and separated from others, standing as if alone.” Lao Dan said: “I was letting my mind wander in the beginning of things” (21, 711–712, cf. M201–202).

## 2.2 *Losing Parts of Oneself*

The most obvious examples of incomplete persons occur in chapter 5, which presents a series of powerful individuals who are either crippled or who have been physically mutilated, especially by chopping off part of the feet, one of the traditional “Five Punishments.”<sup>7</sup>

Wang Tai 王骀 of Lü had lost one of his feet, but he drew half the population of Lu as followers. He taught without words, but people “went to him empty and returned full” (*xu er wan, shi er gui* 虛而往, 實而歸 5: 187, cf. M42). Someone asks Confucius whether it is possible to teach without words and a formless way to

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the perfect ones of ancient times first made sure they had it in themselves (*xian cun zhu ji* 先存諸己) before attempting to give it to others (*cun zhu ren* 存諸人, 4: 134, W22). And “the Great Man has no self” (*daren wu ji* 大人无己, 17: 574, W129).

<sup>7</sup> The “Marquis of Lü on Punishments” chapter of the *Shang shu* 尚書 (Book of Documents) lists them as: execution, cutting off both feet, cutting off the left foot, cutting off the nose, and tattooing the forehead.



make the mind complete (*wu xing er xin cheng* 無形而心成, 5: 187, cf. M42–43). Confucius replies that Wang Tai is a sage, who is able to avoid the transformations of life and death because he understands that “the destiny of things is transformation (*ming wu zhi hua* 命物之化) and thereby preserves what is essential” (而守其宗也 5: 189, M43).

Shentu Jia 申徒嘉 is physically mutilated but this does not affect his internal completeness. As he remarks to his fellow-disciple Zichan of Zheng 鄭子產, people laugh at him for having only one foot, but for nineteen years, his master Bohun Wuren 伯昏無人 has never called attention to his mutilation. He adds:

今子與我遊於形骸之內，而子索我於形骸之外，不亦過乎！

Now you and I are wandering in the interior of form and body, but you keep drawing me to their exterior; isn't that too much? (5: 196–198, cf. M45)

Another mutilated man, Shushan No Toes (*Shushan wu zhi* 叔山无趾) goes to visit Confucius, who upbraids him for having incurred calamity (*fan huan* 犯患) to his person. Shushan replies:

吾唯不知務而輕用吾身，吾是以亡足。今吾來也，猶有尊足者存，吾是以務全之也。

“It's only because I didn't know my proper business and made light of my physical person [*shen*] that I lost the front of my feet,” said No Toes. “But now I have come, and I still have something more honorable than my feet and so I am making it my business to keep it whole (5: 202 M45).

All these individuals have preserved their essential integrity at the cost of the integrity of their physical persons. They are contrasted to “normal” people who are physically whole but at the mercy of transformation. As chapter 12 puts it, “multitudes of people have heads and feet, but not minds and ears.” In other words, one can have physical attributes (feet, heads) intact, but not be able to listen or understand clearly. But form and formlessness cannot coexist: “while there is absolutely no one who has a physical form that can coexist with the formless and the shapeless” (有形者與无形无狀而皆存者盡无). By contrast, “to forget things and to forget heaven is called forgetting the self (*wang ji* 忘己). Those who forget themselves may be said to have entered heaven” (*wang ji zhi ren ru tian* 忘己之人，是之謂入於天, 12: 427–28, M109). A different version of incompleteness occurs in several narratives in chapter 6. These present people who lose or forget parts of themselves, specifically of their physical persons.

Ziyu 子輿 responds to a disfiguring illness and the progressive malformation of his physical person with a detached kind of interest that the creator of things (*zao wu zhe* 造物者) is making him all crooked: with a hunched back, chin in his navel, shoulders above his head. But his heart-mind was calm and easy, and he was unconcerned (6: 258–259). When asked if he resents this, he replies:

亡，予何惡！浸假而化予之左臂以為雞，予因以求時夜；浸假而化予之右臂以為彈，予因以求鴟炙；浸假而化予之尻以為輪，以神為馬，予因以乘之，豈更駕哉！且夫得者，時也，失者，順也；安時而處順，哀樂不能入也。此古之所謂縣解也，而不能自解者，物有結之。且夫物不勝天久矣，吾又何惡焉！

No, why should I resent it? Supposing that my left arm were transformed into a chicken, I would consequently go looking for a rooster that could call out the hours of the night. Supposing that my right arm were transformed into a crossbow, I would consequently go looking for an owl to roast. Supposing that my buttocks were transformed into wheels and my spirit into a horse, I would consequently mount upon them. What need would I have for any other conveyance (6: 260, M58).

Here an originally complete person is (or is potentially) diminished or partially disassembled but these changes are not of the slightest concern. In another incident in chapter 6, a man is on the verge of death, surrounded by his mourning family. His friend upbraids them and tells them to “go away and not disturb the transformation” (6:261, M59). When Confucius hears of a group of friends who sing, rather than mourn, after one of their friends has died, he describes them as people who:

修行无有，而外其形骸，臨尸而歌，顏色不變，無以命之。… 遊方之外者也；而丘，遊方之內者也。

cultivate nonbeing and put physical form beyond them. They sing in the presence of the corpse without the slightest change of expression. There’s no way I can describe them ... they are people who wander beyond the spatial world while I wander within it (6: 267, M60).

A similar viewpoint appears in the story of the death of Zhuangzi’s wife (18: 614–15, M168–69). In summary, the *Zhuangzi* repeatedly uses as positive examples individuals who “lose” part or all of themselves, or who “forget” themselves,” sometimes through “wandering.” What does neuroscience have to say about this?

### 2.3 *The Self in the Brain: Self-Referential Processing*

Several neuroscientists have argued for the existence of a physical self, variously described as a sensorimotor “proto-self,” distinguished from several other “selves” by the stimuli to which it responds and the domain in which it acts.<sup>8</sup> Georg Northuff notes that this “self” resembles what William James (1890) called the physical self, and interacts with several other “selves” with distinct domains of activity. One is a “minimal self” or “core or mental self,” which resembles James’ “mental self.” Another is an “autobiographical” or “narrative self,” which has some similarities to James’ “spiritual self.”<sup>9</sup> But the identification of these distinct domains of selfhood in the brain leaves unanswered the question of what links them together in what we commonly recognize as a self or person.

<sup>8</sup>For the proto-self see Damasio 1999, Gallagher and Meltzoff 1996, and Panksepp 1998a and 1998b.

<sup>9</sup>Northoff et al. 2006: 440. For “minimal” and “narrative” self see S. Gallagher 2000 and H. L. Gallagher and Frith 2003. For core or mental self and autobiographical self see Damasio 1999. For other accounts of “minimal self models” see Blanke and Metzinger 2009 and Metzinger 2004, Voegeley and Fink 2003.

Some neuroscientists think that the brain creates a sense of self through “self-related processing” (SRP).<sup>10</sup> SRP works on prereflective stimuli associated with a strong sense of selfhood.<sup>11</sup> It operates through a central integrative neural system made up of cortical midline structures (CMS), which are identifiable in both anatomy and function.<sup>12</sup> CMS seem to be involved in self-referential processing across several domains, including language, spatial perception, memory, emotion, facial recognition of oneself and others, and perception of agency and the ownership of one’s movements.<sup>13</sup> These structures are probably not unique to humans, and may be homologous across mammalian species. Some cognitive scientists claim that many animal species have self-related processing abilities. They may operate through subcortical–cortical midline structures that are homologous across mammalian species.<sup>14</sup>

It is not clear what it might mean to undo or unlearn self-referential processing, but nothing in the *Zhuangzi* passages discussed above recommends anything like this.

### 3 Embodied Cognition in the *Zhuangzi*

The term “embodied cognition” broadly refers to the view that cognitive processes are deeply rooted in the body’s interactions with the physical world; and that the body shapes the mind in important ways. On this view, to understand the mind, we need to understand interactions between the mind, the body and the physical world. Embodied cognition strongly contrasts to a view of human cognition as centralized in the mind or rational faculty, and distinct from the body and its wide variety of sensorimotor processing. That view includes distinct claims, including claims that cognition is situated in the context of physical environments; and that in important ways, the purpose of cognition is action (Wilson 2002).

In recent years it has been argued embodied cognition is central to understandings of virtue in early Chinese philosophy, typically understood as Confucian virtue (e.g. Slingerland 2003, 2011). For all the importance of that issue, I would also argue that in the *Zhuangzi* specifically, embodied cognition is of central importance in three ways: in the *Zhuangzi*’s recommendation to act by not acting (*wuwei* 無為,

<sup>10</sup>Northoff and Bermpohl 2004:102–107; Northoff et al. 2006; D’Argembeau et al. 2005 and 2007.

<sup>11</sup>Gallagher and Zahavi 2005, Legrand 2003, 2005, Legrand and Ruby 2009, Ruby and Legrand 2006.

<sup>12</sup>Cortical midline structures include the medial orbital prefrontal cortex (MOFC), the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), the sub/pre- and supragenual anterior cingulate cortex (PACC, SACC), the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC), the medial parietal cortex (MPC), the posterior cingulate cortex (PCC), and the retrosplenial cortex (RSC). See Northuff and Bermpohl 2004 and Northuff et al. 2006: 441–42.

<sup>13</sup>Northuff et al. 2006: 446–449.

<sup>14</sup>Northoff and Bermpohl 2004; Northoff et al. 2006; Northoff and Panksepp 2008, Panksepp 2005.

and related expressions); in its recommendation to approach things according to how they spontaneously are of themselves (*ziran* 自然); and in its account of skilled action.

### 3.1 *Wuwei*

The *Zhuangzi* repeatedly argues that the best way to accomplish action is indirectly, often with a seeming lack of purpose or exertion. The strongest expression of this is in the term *wuwei* (acting without acting), which occurs in the *Zhuangzi* several times. For example, in a conversation with Hui Shi about a “useless” tree, he urges him to “act without acting at its side, and go wandering (*wuwei qi ce, xiaoyao* 無為其側, 逍遙 1: 40, after G47). It describes *dao* as “without action and without [physical] form” (*wuwei wuxing* 無為無形, 6: 246).

But as Slingerland has pointed out (2004: 334), although *wuwei* appears fairly rarely in the *Zhuangzi*, a related group of metaphors describe action by a kind of relaxed lack of exertion. Especially important is “wandering” or “playing” (*you* 遊). Other examples include “being at peace” (*an* 安), “flowing with” (*shun* 順), “riding” (*cheng* 承), “following” (*yin* 因, *sui* 隨) and “leaning on” (*yi* 依). For example, the “hinge of *dao*” (*dao shu* 道樞) is likened to following (*yin*), rather than making (*we*) descriptive/normative judgments (*shi* 是, 2: 66). Successful tiger keepers know better than to give their tigers live prey or even whole food, either of which would excite their ferocity. Instead, they wait until the tiger’s hunger is sated. And the tigers fawn on their trainers who follow along with (*shun*) it (the tigers’ nature, 4: 167). In general, the *Zhuangzi* advises to “follow what is so of itself (*yin ziran* 因自然, 5: 221).

### 3.2 *Skill and Spontaneity*

The *Zhuangzi* repeatedly depicts skillful individuals who excel at the performance of a craft or skill. They begin with the skillful butcher Pao Ding 庖丁 of chapter 3. They continue in the Outer Chapters with Wheelwright Bian (Lun Bian 輪扁 of chapter 13), and six characters from chapter 19: a hunchback (*julou zhangren* 侏儒丈人) who catches cicadas, an expert ferryman (*jin ren* 津人), an expert swimmer (*zhangfu you zhi* 丈夫游之), the bell stand maker Woodworker Qing (Zi Qing 梓慶), the skillful driver Dongye Ji 東野稷, and the skillful draftsman Artisan Chui (Gong Chui 工倕).<sup>15</sup> They also include the skillful draftsman (*hua zhe* 畫者) of chapter 21 and the skillful swordsmith (*chui gou* 捶鉤) of chapter 22. For example, Cook Ding describes his skill thus:

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller treatment of the skill stories see Lai and Chiu 2019.

始臣之解牛之時，所見无非〔全〕牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。

When I began to carve oxen, I saw nothing but [whole] oxen wherever I looked. Three years later, I never saw an ox as a whole. Now I am in touch through the spirit and do not look with the eye. I know how to stop the senses, and the spirit I desire to run its course. I rely on Heaven's structuring, cleave along the main seams, take as my guide the main cavities, and rely on what is so of itself [*ziran*]. (3: 119, after G63-64).

The other craftsmen also, to varying degrees, make explicit their use of heightened awareness. For example, according to Wheelwright Bian, the balance necessary to make the spokes of a wheel fit exactly right is:

得之於手而應於心，口不能言，有數存焉於其間。臣不能以喻臣之子，臣之子亦不能受之於臣

something you “get” in your hands and feel in your heart-mind; the mouth cannot put it into words; there is a kind of knack to it. I cannot teach it to my son, and he cannot learn it from me. (13: 491, cf. G140).

When Confucius asks the skillful cicada catcher about his skill, he replies “I have *dao*” (*wo you dao ye* 我有道也), and describes his perceptions thus:

吾處身也若厥株拘，吾執臂也若槁木之枝，雖天地之大，萬物之多，而唯螭翼之知。吾不反不側，不以萬物易螭之翼

I empty my body like a rooted tree stump; I hold my arms like the branch of a withered tree; for all heaven and earth's vastness and the myriad things' greatness, I am only aware of the wings of the cicada. I don't wander or waver, and would not change all the myriad things for the wings of a cicada (19: 640, cf. G138).

When asked about his skill, Woodworker Qing describes his preparations for making a bell stand by “fasting to calm the heart-mind” (*zhai yi jing xin* 齊以靜心). He forgets reputation and reward, praise and blame, and skill or clumsiness, and, after seven days, reaches a point where:

輒然忘吾有四枝形體也。當是時也，無公朝，其巧專而外骨消；然後入山林，觀天性；軀至矣，然後成見鑄，然後加手焉

I forget that I have a body and four limbs. During this time there is no “my lord's court”; the skill of it concentrates and outside distractions melt away; only then do I go to the mountain forest to observe Heaven's inherent nature of the wood. The aptitude of the body reaches its peak; and only then do I completely see the bell stand; and only then do I put my hand to it (19: 658–659, after G135).

A third focus of the issue of awareness is its apparent opposite: the account of “forgetting” (*wang* 忘) and “heart fasting.” There is an extensive literature on these stories that is well beyond the scope of the present discussion. The important thing here is that the virtuosity of Cook Ding and the other skill masters is embodied. Ding used his mind extensively when first learning to carve oxen, but as a skilled performer of his craft, his actions are largely independent of conscious thought, and are spontaneous, “so of itself” (*ziran*).

Brian Bruya (2010a, b) has developed a taxonomy of spontaneous action. He classified spontaneous action under the two categories of wholeness and fluency. Fluency involves the two main notions of ease or effortlessness and responsiveness. Wholeness involves the two activities of collection and shedding. He defines collection as a “calm focus within broad awareness” which consists of “the bringing together of all of the energies of a person first into a state of calm and then to a focus on the activity.” Shedding is “the elimination of everything that can act as an obstacle to the endeavor, such as distractions, consideration of rewards, discursive knowledge, selfishness, the external form of an object, and even perception (paradoxically), even skill, itself. He describes this process of collection and shedding as “a balancing and purifying of the person, bringing the cognitive-affective state to something often compared to a calm pool of water that mirrors the surroundings.” The two are mutually related insofar as shedding clears space for collection, which in turn enhances shedding (2010: 215–16).

The *Zhuangzi* includes several examples of wholeness through collection and shedding. Cook Ding ceases to look at oxen with his senses and seeing them through the patterns of Heaven (chapter 3). Wheelwright Bian perceives the wheel with his senses and responds with his heart (chapter 13). The bell stand maker Woodworker Qing first calms his heart and sheds all distractions, so that his aptitude and dexterity concentrate to such an extent that he can see the bell stand within the wood of the tree (chapter 19). The carpenter first attains single-mindedness and only then can make circles and right angles without tools or calculations (chapter 19).

### 3.3 *Aware Inclination and Agency*

In his work on the *Zhuangzi* and elsewhere, Angus Graham was consistently occupied by these two themes of skill and informed, spontaneous performance. For example, in *Reason and Spontaneity* (1985) Graham notes that rationalists and moralists typically are unwilling to acknowledge that much of what they value arises from areas of human behavior that share the spontaneity of physical events. But physical events are caused, while human action is willed. Even spontaneous activities belong to the realm of the caused, and humans are free agents only to the extent that we learn to direct them.<sup>16</sup>

Graham’s point is that we must recognize that our ultimate goals are spontaneous; and if so, the only necessary first principle becomes “Be aware” (1985: 9). So Graham argues that our goals are grounded not in reason but in inclinations: “We find ourselves compelled in practice to start from inclination as from perception, questioning inclinations like perceptions only when they conflict, without reason having authorized the initial step” (1985: 10). He seems to understand inclinations

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<sup>16</sup>Graham (1985: 7) seems to use the term “spontaneous” for events that are self-caused by the spontaneous inclinations of an “aware” agent, rather than for un-caused events of the kind Aristotle described as chance (*automaton*) or luck (*tuchē*). For further discussion see Raphals 2018b.

as being spontaneously generated by psychological states (1985: 2–3, 7–9). Graham's repeated accounts of the "spontaneous" behavior of characters in the *Zhuangzi* refer to actions that are self-caused (rather than random or uncaused, the other meaning of "spontaneous"). Spontaneous behavior in the exercise of skills, especially, reflects a cultivated disposition that makes these actions effortless but efficacious.

Graham does not emphasize the embodied nature of the Zhuangzian "awareness" he so recommends, but as the skill narratives make very clear, Zhuangzian realized persons act on embodied knowledge. Recent research in several sciences has clarified some of the ways in which spontaneous embodied inclinations may be said to be caused.

### 3.4 *Pre-reflective Awareness*

Contemporary neuroscience suggests that an ensemble of neurological processes make up the experience of the self. As Shaun Gallagher (2000: 14–21) explains it, they are distributed across several regions of the brain, with the result that there is no self-contained neurological "self." On this model of the self, spontaneous action plays an important part in several ways. First, important aspects of consciousness precede, and are not accessible to, reflective thought. Thus, some structures of consciousness are "pre-reflective": hidden from immediate phenomenological experience – things that "happen before we know it" (2005: 2). They also tend to be inaccessible to reflective consciousness. Gallagher asks how consciousness and cognitive processes – including perception, memory and imagination – are structured pre-reflectively by virtue of being embodied.

Central to Gallagher's account of the embodied mind is a distinction between "body image" and "body schema," which he describes as two different but closely related systems:

A body image consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body. In contrast, a body schema is a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring. This conceptual distinction between body image and body schema is related respectively to the difference between having a perception of (or belief about) something and having a capacity to move (or an ability to do something) (Gallagher 2005: 24).

As Gallagher explains it, body image involves more than perception; it can include mental representations, beliefs, and attitudes insofar as they concern one's own body. By contrast, body schema, involves motor capacities, abilities, and habits that enable (and constrain) movement and posture. But body schema also applies to objects of perception and intention beyond one's own body. The difference is like the difference between perception of movement and actual movement. The body schema operates below the level of self-referential intention. It involves "tacit performances" that are almost automatic: "in this sense the body-in-action tends to efface itself in most of its purposive activities" (Gallagher 2005: 24). But



intentional, goal-directed activity can also shape movements controlled by the body schema. Thus a body schema is not a form of consciousness, but it can support (or undermine) the intentional activities of the body image (2005: 26). This prenoetic performance helps to structure consciousness, but does not explicitly show itself. It affects and structures the style and organization of our relations with our environment, including habitual postures and movements. As Gallagher puts it, “the carpenter’s hammer becomes an operative extension of the carpenter’s hand” (2005: 32, 35). In other words, it also potentially informs spontaneous and skilled performance. The interest of this distinction is that both spontaneous inclination or action *and* skill knowledge significantly involve what we might call the *extended* action of body schemas, beyond the workaday monitoring of the body to far more complex activities.

Other research gives similar accounts of choices that are in some sense physically “caused.” For example, according to Antonio Damasio’s somatic marker hypothesis, the brain associates physiological signals (somatic markers) and the emotions generated from them with past actions and outcomes, with the result that somatic markers bias decisions towards some behaviors and away from others (Damasio 1991: 217–299, 1994). Other research suggests that affective reactions too are often faster and more basic than cognitive evaluations, and that anticipatory emotions may be as important as cognitive evaluations in making risky decisions (Loewenstein et al. 2001).

In summary, recent research from a range of disciplines including neuroscience, psychology, cognitive science, phenomenology and philosophy of mind suggests the physical basis of emotion, reason and decision making (rather than the nature of the identity of the “self” who thinks, decides, etc.) This possibility gives Graham’s dictum to “Be Aware” an expanded meaning. While prenoetic processes truly seem beyond the range of self-reflective activity, basing our decisions on maximal awareness includes awareness of somatic states and inclinations.

But this research exacerbates another problem: how “caused” action can be free. Research by Benjamin Libet suggests that unconscious cerebral processes initiate apparently voluntary acts (such as choosing to flick one’s wrist) before the onset of any conscious intention to act. This sort of scenario might seem to undermine free will, but as Gallagher points out, free choice is not about tiny time intervals in the firing of neurons. Free will concerns intentions and purposive actions, however much somatic states and prenoetic knowledge are an important part of our thought processes and decisions (Libet 1985: 529–66, cf. Gallagher 2005: 238).

## 4 Forgetting and Meditation

A different neuroscientific perspective arises from recommendations in the *Zhuangzi* to “forget.” These take the form of accounts of “sitting and forgetting” and of a procedure described as “fasting the heart-mind.” But what is forgotten, how, and why?

The term “forget” (*wang* 忘) occurs frequently in other parts of the *Zhuangzi*. In chapter 2 we are advised that the best way to live out our full years is to:

忘年忘義，振於无竟，故寓諸无竟。

Forget the years, forget duty, be shaken into motion by the limitless, and so find things their lodging-places in the limitless (2: 108, G60).

An account of the death of Laozi in chapter 3 describes mourners at his funeral who grieved (in his view) without cause. Laozi’s friend describes such behavior as “fleeing from heaven and turning one’s back on one’s genuine nature” (*dun tian bei qing* 遁天倍情) and “forgetting what we have received from it” (*wang qi suo shou* 忘其所受, 3: 128 cf. G65).

#### 4.1 Heart-Fasting and Forgetting

Forgetting is central to the method of heart-fasting. *Zhuangzi* 4 describes “heart-fasting” (*xin zhai* 心齋) as the “emptiness” (*xu* 虛) that occurs when one “listens,” not with the ears or mind, but with one’s constituent *qi*, which is “empty.”

若一志，无聽之以耳而聽之以心，无聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。顏回曰：「回之未始得使，實自回也；得使之也；未始有回也；可謂虛乎？」夫子曰：「盡矣。」

“Unify your will. Listen not with your ears but with your heart-mind; listen not with your heart-mind but hear with your *qi*. Listening stops at the ears; the heart-mind stops at tallying. But as for *qi*, it is empty and thus awaits things. Only *dao* can collect emptiness, and emptiness is heart-fasting.” Yan Hui replied: “When I had not yet begun to accomplish this, in actuality I myself was Hui. But having attained it, there has not yet begun to be a Hui. Can this be called emptiness?” Confucius replied: “There it is” (4: 147–48, G68–69, M32–33).

This technique is described as a means to unify the will, but it works by entering a state “before” the constitution of one’s self. *Zhuangzi* 4 (147–48, quoted above) describes this as: “when I had not yet begun to accomplish this, in actuality I myself was Hui. But having attained it, there has not yet begun to be a Hui.” So this technique in some sense involves “forgetting” or letting go the conventional self, but with powerful results:

是之謂坐馳。夫徇耳目內通而外於心知，鬼神將來舍，而況人乎！是萬物之化也

This I call “going at a gallop while you sit.” If the channels inward through eyes and ears are cleared, and you expel knowledge from the heart, the ghostly and daemonic will come to dwell in you, not to mention all that is human! This is to transform with the myriad things (4: 150, G69)

Finally, Confucius remarks as the discussion continues that

行事之情而忘其身，何暇至於悅生而惡死！

If you act on the facts of the situation, forgetful of your own person, how can it ever occur to you that it would please you more to save your life than to die? (4: 155, G70)

In chapter 5, deformed masters of power include crippled advisers to Duke Ling of Wey 衛靈公 and Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公. The text says of them:

故德有所長而形有所忘，人不忘其所忘而忘其所不忘，此謂誠忘。

To the extent then that Power stands out, bodily form becomes something we forget. When people do not forget what they had forgotten but do forget what they had not forgotten, this is what we may call “complete forgetting” (5: 216–17 cf. G80)

Chapter 6 begins with a long description of the felicitous practices of the “true ones of antiquity” (*gu zhi zhen ren* 古之真人), including a description of their mode of breathing). They did not know how to take delight in life or hate death, and:

不忘其所始，不求其所終；受而喜之，忘而復之，是之謂不以心捐道，不以人助天。是之謂真人。

did not forget from where they began or seek out where they would end. Receiving things, they were pleased, but they forgot them and gave them back. This is what is called not damaging *dao* by means of the heart-mind and not using the human to do the work of Heaven. (6: 229, cf. G85)

Here, not forgetting means retaining an awareness of earlier states, and forgetting seems to mean not being attached to things. Another passage compares fish in water to humans in *dao*. Fish gather together in water and pools, which nourish them. Humans gather together in *dao* and their lives stabilize (*sheng ding* 生定) by not engaging in practical affairs (*wu shi* 无事). Therefore, “fish forget each other in rivers and lakes; humans forget each other in the arts of *dao*” (*dao shu* 道術, 6: 272, G90).

Yet another type of forgetting described in the *Zhuangzi* is “sitting and forgetting” (*zuo wang* 坐忘), a meditative technique still practiced today in Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen* 全真) Daoism (Kohn 2015). The term first appears in the *Zhuangzi*, in a discussion between Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui 顏回 on the latter’s “progress.” Yan Hui forgets the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, rites and duty (6: 283–84), and reaches the point where he just “sits and forgets” (*zuo wang*). Confucius questions him and Yan Hui describes it thus:

墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。

I let fall my limbs and body, abandon ears and sight (or “abandon intelligence”), take leave of my physical form and banish knowledge, and reunite with the Great Rapport. This is what I call “sitting and forgetting” (6: 284).

These passages agree overall in extolling the virtue of forgetting, but what is to be forgotten? (Here I understand “forgetting” broadly to also include deliberately letting go or excluding.) These passages mention some seven different things to be forgotten, including: time (the years of one’s life), social obligations (duty), personal origin or natal endowments, sensation (sight and hearing), knowledge or the

heart-mind, one's body (*shen, xing*); and external things. Of these passages, 6: 284 is the most comprehensive in its recommendations.

## 4.2 *The Neurology of Memory*

To understand a neurological account of different kinds of forgetting we need to understand three different kinds or systems of memory formation.

The idea of multiple memory systems first appeared in scientific literature in the mid-1970s, but the idea originates with the French philosopher François-Pierre-Gonthier Maine de Biran (1766–1824). He suggested that habit based on repetition was accompanied by increasingly automatic performance and decreasing conscious awareness, with the result that eventually one becomes unaware of their source or the voluntary action directing them (Maine de Biran 1954: 73). Maine de Biran postulated the existence of three separate kinds of memory, with different properties and based on different mechanisms. Mechanical memory was largely unconscious and concerned the acquisition of motor and verbal habits. Sensitive (or sensory) memory was concerned with the acquisition of feelings, affects, and fleeting images, and often operated non-consciously; Representative memory is involved in conscious recollection of ideas and events.<sup>17</sup> Maine de Biran argued that habit underlies much cognition, including complex and conscious aspects of memory. Nonetheless, multiple-memory theories only became dominant in the 1970s.<sup>18</sup> These three types of memory persist under the terms procedural, semantic and episodic memory. Although more recent memory-systems theorists presently describe five types of memory, these three remain of central importance.<sup>19</sup>

Procedural memory (of which “muscle memory” is one form) operates at an automatic rather than a conscious level, and is involved in learning both behavioral and cognitive skills. It is not concerned with truth; it does not store representations

<sup>17</sup> Maine de Biran 1954: 156, cited in Schacter and Tulving 1994: 4.

<sup>18</sup> Reasons include new understandings of the involvement of hippocampal structures in amnesia; evidence for the dissociation of episodic versus semantic and declarative versus procedural memory; and the realization that the operations of memory are sometimes expressed implicitly rather than explicitly (Schacter and Tulving 1994: 31) For the history of memory research see Eichenbaum and Cohen 2001 and Schacter 1989 and 1996.

<sup>19</sup> In 1994, Schacter and Tulving (1994: 26–29) identified five major systems of both short- and long term memory. In addition to these three, they included perceptual-representation memory and working memory. Perceptual-representation memory is presemantic and nonconscious; it is important for identifying words and objects. Working memory is a flexible cognitive-memory system concerned with temporarily holding and processing information. Like short-term memory, it retains various kinds of information for short periods of time. It is critical to many cognitive tasks, and has a complex relationship to long-term memory systems. A more recent review (Markowitsch 2013: 7–9) identifies five long-term memory systems. In addition to the above three, they include priming and perceptual memory. Priming is the ability to re-identify previously perceived stimuli. Perceptual memory makes it possible to distinguish objects or person by distinct features.

of external states of the world. Its output is non-cognitive, and it is relatively independent from hippocampal structures. It works by gradual and incremental learning. It ranges from simple associative learning to kinaesthetic memory and complex skills, deliberately acquired. All these are “how-to” memory: memory of how to do something (Sutton 2016). Over time these become habitual and automatic, and with enough practice, lead to proficiency and “virtuosic” performance.

Semantic memory is context-free and is concerned with the acquisition and retention of factual information and general knowledge about the world, including knowledge and beliefs about the world. It can be described as “remembering that.” Highly conscious and is acquired by learning, it is memory for facts, concepts and values, including cultural knowledge and accepted “facts” about the world. It is forward looking (proscopic) and forms the root of conscious ideals (Tulving and Lepage 2000: 2013).

Episodic memory (also called autobiographical, experiential, or personal memory) is context specific with respect to both time and place. It makes it possible to remember past experiences and to consciously remember sequences of events in subjective time. It is conscious and closely bound to language; and is considered the most recently evolved system, from semantic and working memory. It goes beyond semantic memory in the ability to record and recall personal experiences in temporal contexts. It is backward looking (palinscopic) and “chunks” episodes into groups. It is responsible for “personal narratives” that form the basis of personal identity, a view first put forward by John Locke.<sup>20</sup>

These memory areas depend on different structures in the brain. Procedural memory is linked to the basal ganglia and motor-related areas of the brain. Both semantic and episodic memory are linked to limbic structures, but semantic memory is linked to the cerebral cortex and the left frontotemporal cortex, while episodic memory is linked to the prefrontal cortex and right frontotemporal cortex (Markowitsch 2013: 7–12).

### 4.3 *The Zhuangzi on Memory*

As Livia Kohn points out, the *Zhuangzi* has very different attitudes toward these three kinds of memory. It repeatedly extols procedural memory through skill stories (Cook Ding, Wheelwright Bian, the cicada catcher, etc.). The virtuosity of these skill masters is largely independent of conscious thought or emotional engagement. Kohn (2015: 167–68) argues that the *Zhuangzi*’s accounts of aligning with heaven, acting spontaneously and by *wuwei* all refer to this level of neuropsychological functioning. She considers the *Zhuangzi* to be much more suspicious of both semantic and episodic memory. One problem with episodic memory is that it is the source of the social “person” manifested in daily life and visible to others (Kohn 2014: 61).

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<sup>20</sup> Locke 1690; Tulving and Lepage 2000: 212.

For the *Zhuangzi*, the physical person (*shen*) is inadequate as a “self” or identity because it is unstable and in constant flux, Insofar as the self-understanding of episodic memory is necessary for the conduct of daily life, he approves of it, and recommends preserving it and enhancing it, but its value ends there.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.4 Why Forget?

Kohn (2015: 170) has argued that this “forgetting” can be explained neurologically as an active process, and describes *zuo wang* as “a technology of designing person-ality through the elimination of unwanted memories” that arise from personal and social circumstances and interfere with the “flow” of *dao*. In particular, she views semantic memory as the major target of *zuo wang* because of its link with judgments of right and wrong (*shifei* 是非).

But how does one “forget”? The goal would seem to be the “forgetting” of long-term memory, presumably by preventing its formation. Kohn suggests that the key to *zuo wang* might lie with the amygdala, which in its normal function generates the automatic subcortical responses associated with stress and “flight or fight” reactions. Part of its activity is a learned “fear” response. Studies have shown that chronic stress increases the number and density of nerve dendrites in this region. The result is a pattern of “primal thinking” that propagates and increases fear and focuses the mind on perceived threats. By contrast, the medial prefrontal cortex may act as a fear inhibitor.<sup>22</sup>

Inhibition of fear by the medial prefrontal cortex requires the active involvement of the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain that “maintains representations of goals and means to achieve them. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex has the power to override the other areas, while the rostral prefrontal cortex is in charge of mediating between internal states and external stimuli. It sets priorities between internally generated (stimulus-independent) input and stimulus-oriented thoughts or sensory input (Davidson et al. 2007: 49).

### 5 Conclusion

To what extent, if any, do the insights of neuroscience and cognitive science bear on our understanding of the *Zhuangzi*? It could be objected that such concerns are profoundly anachronistic, and interfere with, rather than enhance, our reading of one of the most profound texts of the Chinese philosophical tradition.

<sup>21</sup> Jochim 1998: 47; Sommer 2010: 217.

<sup>22</sup> Kohn 2015: 170–172; Quirk 2006: 28–31; Santee 2008: 99; Schiller et al. 2008.

Here, the devil is in the details. Attempts to reduce the insights of the *Zhuangzi* to neuro- or cognitive science, or to claim that the authors of this text had in some manner anticipated these insights would indeed be nonsensical at best. By contrast, an understanding of how the contemporary scientific insights reinforce the recommendations of the *Zhuangzi* – for those of us who think the texts does make recommendations – may enrich our reading. I conclude by summarizing these insights under each of the three headings of this chapter.

The first is the nature of the self. In calling into question perceptions of selfhood and identity, the *Zhuangzi* can be aligned with modern claims for the artificiality of the self from David Hume (1960[1888]) to Derek Parfit (1971, 1995). All these views are largely supported by the evidence of neuroscience and cognitive science, which from their own materialist and evidential perspectives also suggest that the self is not a fixed entity somewhere in the brain but a complex and changing network of multiple processes common to both humans and higher primates.

The views that cognitive processes are deeply rooted in the body's interactions with the physical world, and that the body shapes the mind in important ways, are now widely held across many disciplines. They are also widely understood in contemporary discussions of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>23</sup> A third rubric are what appear to be meditation techniques described in the *Zhuangzi*, which describe in some detail techniques for “forgetting,” emptying the mind, or dissociating the mind from the body. It is here that perhaps the scientific evidence has the least relevance or value to *Zhuangzi* studies. The biology of memory, or its eradication, seems especially not relevant to our understanding of the phenomenology of these experiences.

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. Bruya 2010a, b, Kohn 2015, Michael 2005, from quite different perspectives. Goldin 2003 appears to be an exception, but even here the focus is on the “mind-body problem” of Western philosophy, rather than the body's engagement in learning or decision making. For recent discussions of the mind-body problem in the context of Chinese philosophy see Raphals 2015 and Slingerland 2013, 2016.



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**Part VI**  
**The *Zhuangzi* and Western Philosophy**

## Chapter 30

# The Art of Nourishing Life: Therapeutic Dialectics in the Platonic Dialogues and the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*



Rohan Sikri

## 1 Introduction

Zhuangzi and Plato make an unlikely philosophical pair. In their most generic renditions, the former is understood to be a radical skeptic, dismantling all fixed judgments and claims to knowledge, while the latter is prized for being among the earliest architects of a systematic, dialectical philosophy. I will subscribe to such traditional positions only very loosely in this essay and argue instead that these two figures in fact offer exciting prospects for a comparative analysis. A particularly compelling invitation to compare emerges in the strikingly similar choice of metaphors that both Chinese and Greek models utilize to flesh out a normative philosophical method. In the *Phaedrus*, after the menace of sophistry has been momentarily contained by checking Phaedrus' empty rhetorical flourishes, Socrates affirms the model of the butcher (*ho mageiros*). The philosopher, he tells his young companion, must use his dialectic to divide according to the various forms in the manner of a skilled butcher, who does not arbitrarily hack through the flesh, but rather cuts "according to its natural joints."<sup>1</sup> Zhuangzi likewise extols the virtues of the butcher, staging in grand fashion the almost musical strikes of Cook Ding's blade, which provides the sage with a model for how to parse through categories in a manner that accords with the natural patterns of *dao* 道. How should we read this intriguing intersection of conceptual metaphors? What do they tell us about the

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<sup>1</sup> *Phaedrus* 265e. All original text and line numbers cited from the *Loeb Classical Library* editions of the dialogues. Subsequent citations made in the body of the text, and all translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

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philosophical ground that both Plato and Zhuangzi share? Do they speak to a similar index of problems that occupies the two philosophers? And what do the dissimilarities in the two metaphors – that is, the specific differences within the overarching similarity of symbols – tell us about how the Chinese and Greek models depart from one another?

Even a cursory study of these two metaphors reveals additional conceptual layers in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Phaedrus* that hold our attention further. In both cases, the analogy with the butcher brings the reader into the company of not two, but three, figures. The philosopher-sage is, or ought to be like, the butcher, we are told. But both, in fact, share an affinity with one more person of notable skill – the medical healer. Thus, in the *Zhuangzi*, Cook Ding's art with the blade is met with great admiration on the part of his interlocutor, King Wen Hui, who affirms the ability to carve myriad bodies of oxen in their diverse entanglements of flesh and bone. Metonymically, the appraisal extends to the dialectical blade of the sage, which, likewise, is able to negotiate eristic argument (*bian* 辯) and clearly divide and demarcate categories that constitute what one can claim as knowledge (*zhi* 知). But the King, upon hearing the Cook's sage words, exclaims in a medical parlance that he has now learned how to “nourish life (*yang sheng* 養生).”<sup>2</sup> The sage, who divides with the precision of a butcher, then also administers a therapy not unlike a doctor.

Socrates' use of the example of the butcher in the *Phaedrus* serves, in much the same fashion, to foreground the exemplary method of division, or *diairesis*, that distinguishes the philosopher from the wily rhetorician. For rhetoric to be *true* rhetoric – that is, for it to be *dialectical* – one must, like Socrates, be a “lover of methods of division and collection” (266b). This involves emulating the skilled butcher, who cuts according to the natural joints rather than arbitrarily “hacking through any part” (265e). A truly persuasive speech is then one in which ideas are composed as a result of a similarly perspicuous cutting, a division of categories along naturally given patterns that models the cuts of the flesh along its natural joints. The method's therapeutic potential is subsequently affirmed when Socrates, after likening the method of division to the art of the butcher, extends this kinship to the Hippocratic art. “Isn't the method of medicine” Socrates suggests to Phaedrus, “the same as the method of [true] rhetoric?” (270b).

The intersection of these three figures – the philosopher, the butcher, and the doctor – in the Platonic dialogues and the *Zhuangzi* does not amount to a merely decorative trope. Instead, as I hope to argue in this essay, the relation between these characters is brought to bear on a set of questions that play a pivotal role in both the Chinese and Greek contexts – questions, in particular, that concern the nature of therapy, the methods by which it is most efficaciously administered, and the school or office under whose purview the therapeutic skill should fall. The medical practitioners of ancient Greece and Warring States China present Plato and Zhuangzi with

<sup>2</sup> *Zhuangzi* 8/3/12. Citations to the original text are from the Harvard-Yenching Concordance and are subsequently made in the body of the essay. All translations from the Chinese are mine unless stated otherwise.

an ostensible model when it comes to thinking about such matters, and, in this respect, it is no surprise that they are repeatedly drawn into discussions of sickness and health. But whereas traditional doctors treat the pathologies of the body, Plato and Zhuangzi appear to be concerned with an order of sickness that transcends this traditional therapeutic mandate.

The picture I hope to convey, however, is not one of identical models of philosophical therapy. Important differences exist within the overarching similarities between the therapeutic models of Plato and Zhuangzi, and it is to these that I also draw the reader's attention. The *Zhuangzi* extends its model of "nourishing life" to include practices identified with the "empty (*xu* 虛)" sage, whose method of division is constantly curtailed in scope by an activity described as *zuowang* 坐忘, or "sitting and forgetting." A truly therapeutic outcome in the *Zhuangzi* is accordingly to be measured by an awareness that encompasses not only *how* to divide, but also *when* (and *when not*) to divide. Quite to the contrary, it is as an act of *recollection* or *un-forgetting* (*anamnesis/alēthein*) that Plato presents the philosophical exercise, and the therapeutic method of division gives way to an open-ended course of treatment under the philosopher's gaze. Socrates, as a physician of the soul, participates in a dialectic that is always ongoing and without end, repeatedly sharpening the surgical blade of his method to make better categories and thus closer approximations to the true patterns of nature. Such a life, Plato tell us, is one of *eros*, a condition in which the philosopher emerges as a lover suspended between complete lack and complete fulfilment. Notably, this is also a condition that has decidedly pathological ramifications for the erotic victim.

The disjuncture between circumspection and zealotry, between a reluctance to philosophize and an ardor and devotion to constant philosophical exercise, only begs the question: Does the Socratic philosopher remain unscathed from the threat of sickness that philosophy itself stands to turn into, especially if it is unbridled in its exercise and scope (as Zhuangzi so emphatically asserts)? And, as a corollary to this question, one wonders whether the therapeutic project that Plato so eloquently weaves through his various discussions of philosophical method must ironically collapse in the hands of a figure that alternates between the image of an adept doctor and an impaired patient struck by the arrow of *eros*?

## 2 The *Zhuangzi* at the Intersection of Medicine and Philosophy

Sivin and Lloyd's claim that "the abilities underlying science and medicine are diffused through many levels of Chinese society"<sup>3</sup> expresses a widely accepted point of view, and one that enables us in establishing an adequate hermeneutical context for reading the *Zhuangzi* as a text concerned with therapy or therapeutic methods.

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<sup>3</sup> (Sivin and Lloyd 2002, 27).



Scholars are in general agreement that questions regarding health, the administering of cures, and the exemplary figures to emulate, all come to be shared across a varied intellectual and social fabric in the Warring States and later eras. In this diverse climate of health-care, the character to denote the traditional healer of the body – *yi* 醫 – includes within its protean reach a whole host of figures in pre-imperial times. We find, in this varied group, scholars and other literati in the lineage of court-philosophers who begin to absorb medical paradigms into their systems of knowledge, as well as medical practitioners who likewise come to be affected by the availability of traditional philosophical paradigms.<sup>4</sup>

If we turn, for instance, to the first classic of Chinese medicine in the received canon, the *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經, we encounter conceptual schemes and general theoretical assumptions that are adapted from philosophical traditions. Scholars have laid bare a primarily Confucian and Syncretist vocabulary at work in this text, where a Confucian model for political stasis or disorder, expressed with the character *luan* 亂, is adapted into a medical understanding of pathology.<sup>5</sup> The *Suwen* 素問 recension of the *Huangdi Neijing* attests to this borrowing not only in its use of the character *luan* but equally so in the remedial therapies that it offers – therapies such as acupuncture and their underlying assumptions of vessel theory, which display a conceptual overlap with philosophical models of health and harmony in terms of stable relations between operational centers and subordinate parts.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the importance of acupuncture in the *Suwen* attests to the mutual engagement between medical practitioners and a more traditional brand of Confucianism. Discussions of acupuncture, for instance, provide the only context in the *Suwen* for the application of the critical vocabulary of *yi* 義, wherein this central Confucian virtue denoting a ‘right or appropriate course of action’ is translated into the medical goal of restoring a ‘right’ or ‘appropriate’ organization of functions between the various organs and centers in the human body. The physician’s attempt to map out a vessel theory of the human organism, in other words, is informed by an overtly bureaucratic sense of organization entailed in the Confucian use of the term *yi*. Sections of the *Suwen* likewise employ the character *zhi* 治, a central Confucian term that signifies ‘good governance’ or a ‘well-ordered’ state, to indicate a positive prognosis or healing process.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Miranda Brown describes this milieu in terms of a “dialectical relationship between two domains of knowledge” – one that in the third century B.C., as she has shown, results in the constructions of medical archetypes at the hands of scholars renowned for their social and political philosophies. See (Brown 2015, 42).

<sup>5</sup>See (Unschuld 2003) for a systematic treatment of the *Huangdi Neijing* in light of the philosophical schools (in particular, Confucianism).

<sup>6</sup>Numerous examples in the *Suwen* illustrate how complex Confucian structures of state management, and their subsequent rendition in *Huanglao* and Legalist models of rule or law (*fa* 法), form the basis for remedial therapies directed at bodily pathology. *Suwen* 77, for instance, provides evidence of an explicit indebtedness on the part of the physician, who cites the central method of using judgment (*lun cai* 論裁) “based on laws (*fa*) and rules (*ze* 則),” which is in turn identified as “[t]he art of the sages” (*Suwen* 77, cited in (Unschuld 2003, 343)).

<sup>7</sup>For examples of the medical appropriations of this term, see *ibid.*, 340.

Vessel theory and its accompanying remedies are, however, one among other medical traditions in classical China. The excavated texts of *Mawangdui* offer compelling evidence of what Donald Harper has called the “cross-fertilization” between Warring States medicine and philosophy, but of a brand that is decidedly contrary to the kind of conceptual mix we find in the *Huangdi Neijing*. Dating from the third century B.C., the *Mawangdui* corpus displays a holistic approach to healthcare, encompassing dietetics, breath cultivation, exercise, and sexual cultivation. These practices constitute, in other words, a program of macrobiotic hygiene, which the texts render through a carefully curated language of recipes, or methods, aimed at the explicit goal of “nourishing life” (*yangsheng* 養生). Harper stresses the import of the phrase *yangsheng*, ascribing to it the status of a medical tradition in itself, which intersects with traditions of early Daoism and which, as a result, must clearly be distinguished from alternate medical therapies modeled on a Confucian discourse (to be seen, for instance, in the medical paradigms of the later *Huangdi Neijing*).<sup>8</sup>

The third silk manuscript in the *Mawangdui* collection entitled *Yangsheng Fang* 養生方, “Nourishing Life Recipes,” is a detailed presentation of the kind of approach Harper distinguishes from other Confucian based approaches. Eighty-seven recipes discuss various concoctions and exercises aimed at rejuvenating general health, fixing sexual defects, regulating the flow of breath, and even strengthening one’s constitution for times of travel. The nurturing quality of such practices, furthermore, is to be measured specifically in what the texts refer to as a gathering or accumulation of “spirit illumination” or *shenming* 神明. The phrase *shenming* is an obscure one on account of its wide use across the corpus of religious and philosophical texts in early China. In the *Mawangdui* collection, it signifies what Harper calls a “physio-spiritual fusion,”<sup>9</sup> a kind of domestication of the religious idea of spiritual animation at the level of the human organism. This version of *shenming* presents the idea of a spirit as an indwelling core of the *physical* body, and it is the treatment of the physical that unlocks a numinous power.

But the lexicon of “nourishing life” does not lie solely within the domain of macrobiotic hygiene. A text like the *Neiye* 內業, as Harper convincingly demonstrates, displays an interesting blend of medical and philosophical concepts, where the discussion of spirit-illumination occurs on two parallel registers –that of the physical body, but also in relation to the capacities of *xin* 心 or the heart-mind. Sharing a common preoccupation with the ‘Nourishing Life Recipes’ of *Mawangdui*, we find in the *Neiye* the exhortation to states of physical cleanliness and purity. There is, nevertheless, a discernible bias in the program of macrobiotic hygiene laid out, such that the potential of a cleansed set of senses is viewed as subordinate to, and ultimately directed by, the capacities of a “stable heart-mind (*ding xin* 定心).”

定心在中，耳目聰明，四脂堅固…凡心之形：過知失生。

<sup>8</sup> See (Harper 1997, 3–13).

<sup>9</sup> (Harper 1997, 120).

With a stable heart in the center, the ears are sharp and the eyes are clear and the four limbs are firm and secure...Regarding the form of the heart: knowing too much loses life.<sup>10</sup>

The emphasis in the *Neiye* comes to indeed settle quite decisively on “cultivating the heart-mind (*xiu xin* 修心),”<sup>11</sup> which, as the passage suggests, specifically involves the regulation of an appetite for knowledge. If the text opens with an emphatic declaration about nurturing the essence of life (*sheng* 生), it identifies, with equal emphasis, knowledge (*zhi* 知), and “knowing too much,” with “losing life.”<sup>12</sup>

### 3 Diagnostic Frames in the *Zhuangzi*

There is ample evidence for the *Zhuangzi*'s participation in the history of intellectual “cross-fertilization” I have briefly alluded to in the foregoing section. For one, we find a general familiarity with a vocabulary of therapy as well as an explicit concern with the idea expressed in the *Neiye* that the most damaging profile of pathology emerges in a kind of epistemic sickness that afflicts the heart-mind. What catches our attention in this respect is the text's evidently uncharitable treatment of the kind of sage-physician who believes in the curative potential of his *zhi* 知, or knowledge. The fourth of the *Inner Chapters*, *Renjianshi* 人間世, engages such a figure, whom it identifies with Confucius' star-pupil Yan hui. Approaching the Master for counsel on whether he should undertake an expedition to the besieged state of Wei, Yan hui recalls the advice he has once received.

回嘗聞之夫子曰：『治國去之，亂國就之，醫門多疾。』願以所聞思其則，庶幾其國有瘳乎！（8/4/2–3）

I have heard you say, Master: “Leave the well-governed state and go to the disordered one. At the doctor's (*yi* 醫) door, there are only many ill persons.” Using what I have heard, I want to reflect on the rules so that the state can be cured.

At the very outset, this dialogue suggests that the authors of the *Inner Chapters* are indeed familiar with the trope of the philosopher-therapist, on ample display here in a scholar who wishes to absorb the image of the doctor (referred to with the character *yi* 醫) into the fold of a Confucian “reflection on rules.”

But if Yan Hui thereby attempts to argue for the curative power of his epistemology, the *Zhuangzi* appropriates his master's voice to deliver the following condemnation:

<sup>10</sup>Original text cited from (Roth 1999, 59).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>As I have argued in (Sikri 2021), *yangsheng* literature is diverse in its origins as well as techniques, and the macrobiotic hygiene texts of Mawangdui discussed above are by no means the source texts for the tradition of ‘nourishing life’ in Warring States China. While I demonstrate in (Sikri 2021) how the *Zhuangzi* can be read in light of medical texts like *Yinshu* (‘Pulling Book’) and *Maishu* (‘Channel Book’) (part of the *Zhangjiashan* corpus), my aim here is to sketch the very broad parameters of a tradition that is appropriated as a philosophical strategy in early Daoism.

諱!若殆往而刑耳!夫道不欲雜,雜則多,多則擾,擾則憂,憂而不救。(8/4/3–4)

Alas! The likely danger is that you will go and get yourself killed. You do not want to add or mix [rules] to the way, for if you add [rules], this will only lead to many [more], and if there are many [rules], this will cause disturbance, and if disturbed, you will become anxious (*you* 憂), and if you are anxious, you cannot be saved.

It appears that the Confucian healer has ironically become a purveyor of sickness, where the administering of a body of principles leads to a pathological state of anxiety (*you* 憂) and eventually to one's death. A strict reading of this passage might equate the vocabulary of doctors and cures with a rhetorical deployment of such terms with which the *Zhuangzi* is able to undermine the putative value of a Confucian discourse – that is, by showing that *it does not* in fact achieve a cure. Yet, what is at stake here is not simply that the Confucian appropriates a language of cures to add an additional gloss to his discourse, but that this discourse of administering rules results in the very tangible outcome of anxiety, and then death.

This coupling of a language of 'knowledge' with sickness forms the basis for a more detailed set of diagnoses that take shape elsewhere in the *Inner Chapters*. The third chapter entitled "Nourishing Life (*Yangshengzhu* 養生主)," opens with these lines:

吾生也有涯,而知也无涯。以有涯隨无涯,殆已;已而為知者,殆而已矣。(7/3/1)

My life has limits, but knowledge (*zhi* 知) has none. To follow that which is unlimited by means of what has limits is dangerous...one who continues amassing knowledge only compounds the danger.

The earlier association of 'rules and principles' with anxiety or worry is translated here into the idea that knowledge entails a threat to life (*sheng* 生) and that an attempt to accrue knowledge only serves to further imperil it. The text unequivocally associates the character *zhi* 知 with an epistemology built on the dialectic of *bian* 辯, 'argumentative speech' or 'debate.' Indeed, what this line refers to as the limitless in knowledge mirrors a central complaint in the *Qiwulun* – namely, that the dichotomies of the Confucians and Mohists simply accrue with no end in sight and serve only to obscure *dao* and *yan* 言, or speech.<sup>13</sup> Grasping the text's analysis of the specific errors of those embroiled in such debates arguably offers us deeper insights into the etiology of the diseases the *Zhuangzi* hopes to protect its characters from.

If we turn to the *Qiwulun*, then, we find that it sets about dismantling the eristic debates of the Confucians and Mohists into an elemental method that generates ascriptive categories of assent and disapproval. The schematic of any debate or disputation is given in the clear distinction between a positive ascription of what is the case (*shi* 是), and a negative attribution to reference all that is *not* (*fei* 非). The text associates this dichotomy of claims, of what is and is not so, of what is right and wrong, with a vocabulary of artifice and inflexibility.

夫道未始有封,言未始有常,為是而有畛也。(5/2/55)

The way has never had borders; speech has never had any regularity. Make claims about what is so (*wei shi* 為是), or what is right, and there are boundaries.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. (Zhuangzi 1956, 4/2/24–25).

The method of defining what is so consists literally in a ‘making’ of a definition (conveyed by the characters *wei shi*), where the artifice of a fixed category stands in direct contrast to the processual nature of experience that is *dao*. The text subsequently equates the methodologies encompassed by the character *bian* with divisions, or definitions, that try and tell us something about a world that continually eludes their grasp:

故分也者，有不分也；辯也者，有不辯也。曰：何也？聖人懷之，眾人辯之以相示也。故曰：辯也者，有不見也。(5/2/57 – 58)

For one who divides (*fen* 分), there is that which remains undivided; for one who debates and distinguishes between alternatives (*bian* 辯), there is that which remains undistinguished. You ask: “What is this?” Sages conceal it in their embrace; the common people debate (*bian*) it by means of demonstrating it to each other. Thus it is said: For one who debates between alternatives (*bian*), there is something that remains unseen.

Any division of an order of categories, to put it another way, arises from out of, and remains bound to, particular states of affairs. The resulting claims of assent and disapproval are therefore limited in their signification. The vocabulary of *shi* and *fei*, as the passage tells us, generates in its wake a remainder, that which the two poles of the dichotomy cannot bring under its division, and that which consequently remains unseen. To claim what is and is not the case, then, is to, at best, govern one’s reality with ‘indexical’ pronouns that point to what is this and not this, right here, right now.<sup>14</sup> A corollary to the context-dependent nature of division-making is the entrenched perspectivism of the *Qiwulun* on matters of knowing. The authors’ motivation here is not merely to emphasize the equal validity of a set of competing claims, but rather it is to show that from out of particular states of affairs, we are apt to produce normative, evaluative judgments. The text renders this tension between a contextual ground and a normative projection in the following way:

是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。(4/2/29 – 30)

‘This’ (*shi* 是) is also ‘that’ (*bi* 彼); ‘that’ (*bi*) is also ‘this’ (*shi*). ‘That’ (*bi*) involves one set of alternatives between what is so/right (*shi*) and not so/wrong (*fei*); ‘this’ involves one (other) set of alternatives between what is so and not so.

The authors introduce two sets of binomials here – the distinction between this and that (*shi* and *bi*) and the now familiar division of what is so and not so (*shi-fei*). Whereas the *shi-bi* dichotomy refers to different, even opposing, states of affairs

<sup>14</sup> Scholars like Angus Graham and, subsequently, Chad Hansen have shown how Zhuangzi’s critique of methods of debate serves the ultimate purpose of disclosing the “indexicality” of all *shi-fei* distinctions (Hansen 2000, 282–285), (Graham 1969) and (Graham 1989, 177). As ‘indexicals,’ such philosophical distinctions are premised on contexts from out of which they ‘pick out’ (*jǔ* 舉) objects using their names (*míng shí* 名實), and thereafter ‘choose’ (*ju* 取) one as ‘this’ (*shì*) and the other as ‘not’ (*fěi*) (following Graham’s lexical ordering of terms related to a discourse of *bian*) (Graham 1969, 139). In pointing to their indexicality, then, a text like the *Qiwulun* discloses the context-dependency of all philosophical argumentation. Hansen accordingly identifies a notion of “enlightenment” (*míng* 明) in the text with the recognition “that all language is indexical” (Hansen 282).

that determine our experience of the world, the *shi-fei* dichotomy builds a superstructure of evaluative judgments of what is the case and what is not upon this perspectival ground. So, for example, I could experience table manners as consisting in the proper use of a fork and knife, while you could have only ever eaten with your hands. In these differing conditions, we would have equal validity in what we could claim falls under the rubric of etiquette.

But we could also go a step further, and evaluate our experiences and that of others, and extend the judgment that to eat with cutlery is the true and correct way *per se*, while to eat with your hands is to get it all wrong. To the authors of the *Qiwulun*, the dialectic of the Confucians and Mohists does precisely this – it takes a giant step in the direction of imposing fixed, calcified divisions. To judge what is so in any absolute sense, however, is to offer no more than a dogmatic assertion, and every attempt, either by a Confucian or a Mohist, to set aside one set of divisions as true and others as false is understood to end in utter failure. The picture we are left with at the end of the *Qiwulun* is one in which debate carries on, the distinctions pile up, and claims to truth only serve to conceal the promise of meaning that language and thought might hold.

That this accrual of dogmatic assertions imperils life is an additional step, a diagnosis, which the *Qiwulun* carries out by identifying the dialectic of *bian* with the pathologies of what the text calls the ‘completed heart-mind’ or *cheng xin* 成心. The terminology of debate now emerges as part of a larger rubric, a diagnostic frame in which the fixed divisions of what is and is not the case, of what is true (*zhen* 真) and what is false (*wei* 偽),<sup>15</sup> are seen as symptoms of a psychological profile bent on totalization and a kind of cognitive closure. The measure of a ‘completed heart-mind,’ moreover, is only to be found in the endless affirming and denying that locks it in, and this fruitless labor, as the authors continue, only serves to wear out our lives.

一受其成形，不亡以待盡...終身役役而不見其成功，茶然疲役而不知其所歸，可不哀邪！人謂之不死，奚益？其形化，其心與之然。(4/2/18–20)

If you regard what you receive as complete in form, not forgetting it, you just wait out the end...To the end of one’s life to be in constant toil and yet not see the completion of your merit; weary and exhausted and not knowing what it all amounts to – how could one not lament this? Of what use is it that another might say that this person is not dead? The body has decayed, and the heart-mind went along with it.

The threat of decay, both at the level of the body as well as the heart-mind, underscores the diagnostic value of the critical analyses of the *Qiwulun*. The dismantling of pseudo-dialectical structures is not limited to a skeptical agenda on the part of the text’s authors, but instead speaks to their larger concern with identifying the causes for a sickness that ravages both one’s somatic constitution as well as one’s emotive and cognitive centers. Chief among these causes, as we have seen, are sophistic methods that result in disorders of thinking and speaking.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. (Zhuangzi 1956, 4/2/25–26).

## 4 Plato at the Intersection of Medicine and Philosophy

Comparable to the lines of influence in early Chinese intellectual history, we encounter a discernible intersection, or “cross-fertilization,” of the medical arts and schools of philosophy in ancient Greece. In the past century, the scholarship on Plato has been regularly supplied with insightful reminders from those who have returned to this fecund backdrop against which the dialogues were written. The writings of Werner Jaeger, Ludwig Edelstein, G.E.R Lloyd, to name just a few authors, have re-oriented our gaze towards an intellectual culture that is dynamic in its commerce of ideas and directions of influence and that, as a result, precludes any anachronistic rendition of Socratic philosophy and its mandate as bound up with a purely theoretical exercise. Jaeger, for instance, goes so far as to claim that Socrates’ doctrine of ethical knowledge “would be unthinkable”<sup>16</sup> without the achievements of medical science in fifth century B.C. Athens. Conversely, the medical fraternity of Hippocrates itself stands indebted to the Ionian physicalists for effecting the epochal shift from mythological accounts to a reasoning centered on an empirical method of observation.<sup>17</sup> Lloyd’s medical anthropology of classical Athenian society portrays, in a similar vein, a rich and energetic culture that is ‘gripped,’ as he puts it, by a thinking of disease. The intellectual preoccupation into the nature of sickness is widespread, spanning the multiple arts, and its diverse and subtle explorations reach far beyond a catalog of physical pathologies.<sup>18</sup> It is endemic to such a culture, Lloyd suggests, that we find the philosopher who conceptualizes pathology on the register of the soul. Philosophical reflections into the seemingly abstract, eternal truths of causation, nature, or the self, emerge instead as coextensive with a thinking of disease. The philosopher, in other words, must measure these truths in terms of their efficacy in alleviating soul-sickness, an extensive catalog of *nosēmata psukhēs*, which is perceived as the most damning of all diagnoses.

The class of person known as the “amateur” or “untrained person” (*ho idiōtēs*) aids us in a better understanding of the multilayered discourse of medicine in classical Greece. Numerous sections of the Hippocratic corpus foreground the critical position that this non-expert occupies in the practitioner’s audience.<sup>19</sup> While the

<sup>16</sup>(Jaeger 1944, 3).

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 5–6. See also (Longrigg 1993, 26–46).

<sup>18</sup>Lloyd reiterates an idea articulated earlier by Werner, namely, that there exists in ancient Greece a large and energetic “medical public” comprised of the “layperson” (*ho idiōtēs*) – a ‘non-expert’ or non-practitioner of the medical art who nevertheless has been shaped by a “general education” in medicine and can converse with and borrow from its corpus of ideas. See (Lloyd 2003, 152).

<sup>19</sup>The author of the Hippocratic text *On Ancient Medicine*, for example, exhorts the practitioner of the medical art to discuss matters “known to ordinary persons [*dēmotēsin*]” (Jones 1923, II. 14). The *dēmotēs*, while rendering the more general category of a ‘commoner,’ functions as a synonym for the *idiōtēs* here. For the issue at stake is the efficacy of a craft or skill being directed at a lay audience. The resulting challenge for the doctor, then, is this: How can a set of skills and a body of specialized knowledge be made adaptable to an unskilled audience, especially if the latter’s understanding and engagement with the doctor’s prognostic and diagnostic method determines the suc-



term *idiōtēs* includes, to begin with, the patient who must be made amenable to treatment through his or her own understanding of a diagnosis (as opposed to being made to submit through a more coercive type of treatment), the class of amateurs being addressed unmistakably includes the more lettered members of the ‘medical public’ for whom the Hippocratic edifice of ideas and methods are of immense value. The list of ‘medical amateurs’ in classical times is suggestive in this context. Jaeger points to a whole host of personalities professing a keen medical interest and even extending diagnoses, including Thucydides, Herodotus, Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia. The example of Thucydides is perhaps the most well-known. Scholars have noted how his account of the plague of Athens in 430 B.C. exhibits an intimate knowledge with the technique of compiling case histories used in Hippocratic texts, including an investigation into the triggering cause (*hē prophasis*) and a catalogue of subsequent symptoms. As Lloyd notes, Thucydides explicitly sets himself apart from the trained doctors, citing their inability to diagnose and treat the epidemic. He thus stakes his claim to a diagnosis, and a diagnostic art, but he does so primarily as a historian who is simultaneously a medical amateur.<sup>20</sup> As an *idiōtēs*, in other words, none of these figures identify solely (or at all) with the medical profession. It is precisely their dabbling in *hē iatrikē*, “the art of medicine,” that allows them to appropriate, adapt, and transform some of its central ideas and methods and put them to use in domains of inquiry of which they are a *tekhnikos*, or expert.<sup>21</sup>

Yet this is not to suggest some unidirectional flow of information or influence. Just as we find the ‘medical public’ borrowing from the medical arts, medical practice in classical Greece itself comes to be molded in its foundations by the availability of crucial ideas, methodologies, and intellectual revolutions external to its own ranks. A compelling source of evidence for this complex, multidirectional dialogue between doctors and other figures (in particular, the philosopher) comes from the sub-genres of Hippocratic writing that exhibit a discernible philosophic bias. These sections of the corpus suggest more than a mere acquaintance between doctors and the wider intellectual public and, instead, reveal the extent to which philosophy penetrated medical discourses and influenced the directions in which they were to develop.<sup>22</sup> Scholars have identified, for instance, a formative influence in the

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cess of an intended therapeutic program? “If one misses the mark,” the author warns a few moments later, “with respect to the understanding of untrained persons...one will miss reality [.]” (ibid., II, 17–20) There are thus grave risks involved in neglecting the *dēmotēs*, here explicitly identified as an *idiōtēs*.

<sup>20</sup> The analysis of the plague in this respect parallels the account of the moral calamity in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, both accounts mirroring a degradation in human nature – one on the physical register, the other, on the moral. See (Lloyd 2003, 122). For a more general discussion of Thucydides’ non-expert medical knowledge, see Chapter V of the same text.

<sup>21</sup> (Jaeger 1944, 15).

<sup>22</sup> W.H.S Jones, in his introduction to the Loeb edition of *Hippocrates Vol. 1*, gives us a helpful set of classifications here, suggesting three broad genres of Hippocratic writing: (a) religious writings; (b) philosophic theories using unverified postulates; and (c) empiricist writings, displaying a rational method of observation and accumulated experience. See (Jones 1923, xiii).

early texts of the Italian, Coan and Cnidian medical traditions, where new paradigms share the basic theoretical premises of the Pythagorean school and apply these *a priori* assumptions using a method of hypothesis. A pre-Hippocratic text like the *Treatise on Seven* is amongst the earliest indications of these Pythagorean roots with its theory of humors and critical days.<sup>23</sup> These are but strong signals of a broader intellectual trend on which there is widespread consensus. The engine of progress beyond an earlier ‘magical’ or ‘religious’ model of medicine, replete with its incantatory, votive and other faith-based rituals of cure, is inconceivable without the theoretical and methodological advances made by the Pre-Socratic philosophers in conceptualizing nature.<sup>24</sup>

Where does Plato fit into this matrix of conversations? If one is to judge by the sheer quantity of medical analogies and the frequency of discussions across the dialogues that settle on topics related to ‘caring’ or ‘therapy’ (*therapeuein* or *therapeia*) and ‘health’ (*hugieia*), it would appear that Plato wields a potent lexicon in which philosophical and medical considerations converge.<sup>25</sup> There is, moreover, little reason to limit such analogies with the physician to a merely decorative function, as if Plato’s medical vernacular serves the secondary rhetorical purpose of making a foundational philosophical language more compelling. We are instead better equipped with G.E.R. Lloyd’s concept of “semantic stretch,” which arbitrates between mere metaphor and a stronger literal sense by calling the very distinction into question. For Lloyd the texture of Attic Greek does not display a hierarchy of primary and secondary meanings. Rather, words and phrases in the language exhibit qualities of ‘stretch,’ used across varying contexts and equipped with multiple valences. With such an understanding comes the accompanying caution from Lloyd against attempting to “adjudicate on the limits of the ‘strict’ sense of terms.”<sup>26</sup> Plato, then, should not be approached as one who embellishes his theory with talk of doctors but as one who in fact considers himself *to be* a doctor, and his art of philosophy to be an art of therapy *par excellence*.

<sup>23</sup> Jones orients us in these early stages of the development of ‘rational’ medicine by pointing to the important cases in which the Pythagorean and Hippocratic traditions were, in a way, inseparable. Alcmaeon of Croton, for example, was both affiliated with the Pythagoreans as well as thought to be the founder of empirical psychology. He held that health was a balance between opposing forces – a theory that was to become the bedrock of later Hippocratic theory. On the impact of other Pythagoreans, like Philolaus, and the attribution of entire medical schools to philosophers, like Empedocles, See (Jones 1923, xi–xiii).

<sup>24</sup> For a synoptic overview of the textual evidence showing the shift from earlier medical practices that were magic based, and carried out in religious and mystery-cults primarily by the figure of the *iatromantis* or ‘physician-seer,’ to a later ‘rational’ model of medicine with a decidedly philosophical bent, see (Rinella 2010, 61, 150–153) and (Clark 2009, 61, 150–153).

<sup>25</sup> Analogies with the art of medicine (*hē iatrikē*) are too numerous to individually mention here. An often-cited instance is from *Protagoras* 313e, where one who has knowledge of what benefits and harms the soul (a quality that, implicitly, marks the philosopher off from the sophist) is called “a doctor concerning the soul (*peri tēn psukhēn...iatrikos*).” Another emblematic case comes from *Alcibiades* 146e, where the soul’s fate depends on one holding on to knowledge just like “one being weakened holds on to a doctor (...*antekhesthai...hosper asthenounta iatrou*).”

<sup>26</sup> (Lloyd 2003, 10).

I have shown elsewhere the considerable degree to which a single term like *therapeia* is ‘stretched’ across a variety of uses in the Platonic corpus.<sup>27</sup> Among the more frequent, and the more telling, turns of phrase are those in which Plato uses the language of therapy in a distinctly comparative mode, pitting the practice of medicine, which is distinguished by its therapy of the body, against the philosopher’s therapy of the soul. We find here both a complementary and an unequivocally hierarchical rendering of two therapeutic arts. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates elevates the arts of gymnastics and medicine to the status of “mistresses (*despoinas*)” over all the other arts on account of their knowledge of what is beneficial and harmful to “bodily excellence (*aretēn sōmatos*)” (517e–518a). Concerning the soul, Socrates says, “this is the same,” suggesting that the care of the soul involves securing the knowledge of its virtue or state of excellence, or *aretē*.

But it is precisely this excellence of order in the soul, and the means by which it is gained, that constitutes the apex of care-giving – *not* gymnastics and medicine. “[A] good soul, by means of its virtue, allows a body to be the best that it can be,” Socrates declares in *Republic* 403d. Later in his conversation with Glaucon, he marks this hierarchy in the strongest terms with the claim that “the kinds of things concerning the therapy of the body (*peri tēn tou sōmatos therapeia*) have a lesser share of being and truth than the kinds concerned with the therapy of the soul (*peri tēn tēs psukhēs therapeian*)” (585d). The foundational value placed on the treatment or care of the soul is reaffirmed in the *Charmides*, not least by its opening frame in which Critias lures the young Charmides into conversation by telling him that he wants him “to meet a doctor about the sickness (*peri tēs astheneias*) he earlier told me he was suffering from” (155b). The doctor, undoubtedly, is Socrates, and the remainder of his exchange with Charmides, while it revolves around the topic of *sōphrosunē* or temperance, repeatedly returns to the idea that philosophical dialectic is akin to medical charms or *epōida* without which the success of a therapy is impossible.

But Charmides’ ailment is an unremarkable headache. Should the administering of a topical analgesic that directs its power in isolation on the site of pain not suffice as the most efficient remedy in this case? Indeed, this is precisely the model of medicine that Socrates associates with the inferior strain of Greek medicine, which works on ailing parts of the body without an appreciation for the whole of the organism to which these parts belong. The more advanced therapeutic art, Socrates tells Charmides, comes via the Thracian doctors who subscribe to the following medical advice of their king Zalmoxis:

[J]ust as one should not attempt to cure the eyes apart from the head, nor the head apart from the body, so one should not attempt to cure the body apart from the soul...Because, he

<sup>27</sup> I parse through approximately 150 uses of the word *therapeia* to identify the following six, broad categories of ‘semantic stretch’: (1) used as a noun in relation to a *therapist*’s act of service to the gods; (2) as a pejorative term, in relation to an act of service devoted to pleasure; (3) in relation to arts that involve caring for an object; (4) in relation to the art of medicine (*he iatrikē*) and its care of the sick; (5) in relation to the philosopher’s treatment of the soul; (6) in relation to the parallel therapies of philosophy and medicine. See (Sikri 2015).

said, the soul is the source both of bodily health and of bodily disease for the whole man, and these flow from the soul in the same way that the eyes are affected by the head.<sup>28</sup>

The implications of Socrates as a doctor who has *epoidea* or charms to offer Charmides now emerge in their full significance. *Epoida* bring into view the whole organism that is the site of any and all pathologies as they are therapeutic applications that do not immediately correspond, or correspond at all, with localized physical ailments. In the Thracian paradigm, the logic that directs all treatment requires diagnosing a given pathology in terms of a more comprehensive model of regimen or *diaita* that subordinates bodily function to the general health of a soul. A corrective regimen, as it ultimately relates to components of the human organism that go beyond the physical, must therefore utilize, in addition to physical agents, the therapy of the spoken word. Plato seizes upon this possibility, adapting a well-established tradition of incantatory medicine to present us with the supreme physician in the figure of Socrates. Socratic *epoidea*, as Charmides is told, consists of “beautiful words (*logous...kalous*)” (157a), and such words are none other than the philosophical dialectic with which the soul, the ultimate site and guarantor of health, can be cured.

## 5 Diagnostic Frames in the *Timaeus*

What are the specific kinds of diseases that afflict the soul and that the art of philosophy, as the highest and most consequential of therapeutic arts, is entrusted with remedying? Plato frequently elaborates on different kinds of psychological or ‘soul-sicknesses’ – *nosēmata psukhēs* – and these descriptions quickly amass into a list of qualities we might otherwise call character-flaws – qualities like intemperance, lust, anger, injustice, arrogance, etc. Yet, once again, Plato does *not* intend for these conversations regarding the diseases of the soul to merely sound convincing on account of a medical vernacular. He delivers these pronouncements instead as precise diagnostic examinations, and they are intended to not only accommodate for the paradigms of traditional medicine (*he iatrikē*), but are also understood to supplant these models with a more urgent and effective treatment through the dialectic of philosophy.

While we find evidence for these diagnostic frames scattered across multiple dialogues, the *Timaeus* is a particularly well-organized and revealing text for the purposes of understanding Plato’s familiarity with and intervention in the prevailing medical debates of his time. The dialogue’s primary subject – namely, the creation of the macrocosm at the hands of a Demiurge and his progeny of younger, and lesser able, gods – gives way in the final sections to an extended analysis of human diseases. The imprint of Empedoclean biology, as scholars have pointed out, is unmistakable in the general framework of the four-element theory and that of the humors

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<sup>28</sup> Following Sprague’s translation in (Plato 1997, 643)

of the body that Plato both utilizes for his own ends and that he develops further, drawing on Sicilian medical influences and thereby himself making an important contribution to the history of medical science.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the *Timaeus* is particularly interesting for how ingrained its theory of disease remains in the physiological models of Empedocles, Alcmeon and others. We find a complex rendering of bodily and psychological sickness, with etiological theories that connect diseases of the soul to “conditions of the body” (86b), such as an excess of a particular physical element that might ultimately affect one’s psychological health. And likewise, owing to the asymmetries of a stronger, more passionate soul, the weaker body can suffer from a sickness whose etiology is psychological in nature.

The hierarchy of therapeutic arts on clear display in dialogues like the *Charmides*, *Gorgias* and *Republic* thus translates into a more subtle amalgamation of physiological and philosophical theories in the *Timaeus*. Concerning the “compound of soul and body which we call the “living creature,”<sup>30</sup> and which emerges as a more complex psycho-physical site for the discussion of disease, the philosopher nevertheless contributes the singular and more fundamental therapy of the soul. We learn accordingly of the diseases that fall within the philosopher’s jurisdiction, which are of two kinds: madness, or *mania*, and ignorance, or *amathia* (86b). Socrates regards *amathia* in the *Timaeus* as “the greatest disease (*tēn megistēn noson*),” and the dialogue’s hybrid medical theory, combining elements of Empedoclean and Sicilian physiology, identifies its etiology with a diverse set of causes that are both physiological as well as psychological in nature. Of these, Socrates underscores the pathologies of the soul that are attendant on one who indulges in “lusts or contentiousness (*tas epithumias ē peri philonikias*)” and who achieves nothing more than mere beliefs or opinions (*ta dogmata*) (90b). Notwithstanding, therefore, the various other diagnostic trajectories Plato outlines in this dialogue that attempt to relate *mania* or *amathia* to an asymmetry of the elements or humors of the body, the mediating principles of Plato’s therapeutic philosophy remain in place. Diseases of the soul, like ignorance, are “the greatest of diseases,” and their origin lies in a particular disorder of thinking and speaking.

The *Gorgias* rehearses many of the general diagnoses and hierarchies of diseases discussed in the *Timaeus*. To the list of the ‘greatest diseases,’ it adds the “vice of the soul (*hē tēs psukhēs ponēria*),” which it identifies specifically with “injustice (*hē adikia*)” (477c-d). Yet, in this dialogue Plato is more emphatic on the origin of the diseases of the soul, identifying them exclusively with the pathologies inherent to the sophist’s sham dialectic. Steering clear of physiological explanations of elements and humors, the diagnostics of the *Gorgias* focus instead on the distinction between knowledge (*hē mathēsis*) and belief (*hē pistis*). The sophistic art of rhetoric

<sup>29</sup> James Longrigg, in his *Greek Rational Medicine*, suggests that Plato adopts central principles of Empedoclean biology and develops them further in the *Timaeus* such that “the actual theory of disease,” as he writes, “may well be Plato’s own innovation.” Furthermore, Longrigg describes Plato’s adoption of four element theory as “a decisive event in the history of science.” (Longrigg 1993, 112).

<sup>30</sup> *Timaeus*, 88a (Following Bury’s translation).

(*hē rhetorikē*), both Socrates and Gorgias agree, involves the kind of persuasion “concerning what is right and wrong (*peri ton dikaion te kai adikon*)” (454e) that issues from belief. As opposed to knowledge, which can only be true, beliefs can be true or false, and herein lies the pathological threat posed by the sophist’s art. Its flexible dialectic, in other words, can be bent to suit a situation, and this requires peddling in mere opinions without regard for true knowledge. Sophistic rhetoric thus serves only to exacerbate the diseased conditions of the soul, like *amathia*, with its accumulation of false beliefs. Like persons who, physically ill, must submit to a physician’s therapy in order to restore health in the body, those who commit injustice must be “reproved, reprimanded, and made to pay the penalty”<sup>31</sup> if they are to be relieved of their greatest of afflictions. Yet, it is through the art of sophistry, Socrates claims, that such persons are able to evade their punishment, and hence their only prospects for a remedial treatment.<sup>32</sup>

## 6 Therapeutic Dialectics

I have attempted to show, so far, that there are compelling reasons to view both Zhuangzi and Plato as figures who are deeply concerned with questions of health, and who set about diagnosing various orders of disease that are deemed to be more invasive and threatening than physical ailments. Furthermore, the underlying conceptual field in both cases attests to an intersection of medical and philosophical genres, and Plato and Zhuangzi mirror each other in the ways they adapt a medical vernacular to suit their own needs. Plato builds an extensive catalog of “diseases of the soul,” which delimits the scope and agenda of his philosophical program in crucial ways; Zhuangzi too sets about identifying a complex array of pathologies that affects the dynamic capacity identified with the heart-mind. Additionally, these diagnoses of second order pathologies (as *noetic* diseases that affect either *psukhē* or *xin*) appear to share a similar etiology.<sup>33</sup> I have shown, in other words, how Plato and Zhuangzi converge on particular (ab)uses of dialectic (i.e., as eristic/sophistic uses) as the chief cause for the sickness they identify and hope to treat. And so this brings us to the other half of the question of therapy: what kind of treatment or cure do these figures prescribe?

<sup>31</sup> *Gorgias* 478e (Following Lamb’s translation).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 478e–479a.

<sup>33</sup> To be sure, by referring to ‘noetic’ diseases I do *not* have in mind some purely rational faculty of the soul. Neither in the Greek nor in the Chinese models is there a discrete center of reason that is then diagnosed as having a disease. The structure of *psukhē* reflects a complex of epithymetic desires, the passionate drives of the *thumoides*, and the activities of reasoning or dialectic housed in the *logistikōn*. *Xin* 心, likewise, displays an imbrication of physical, emotional, moral, and rational patterns of a consciousness. In both cases, to speak of a ‘noetic disease’ brings into view a certain kind of pathogenic agent or activity and a certain order of sickness. The phrase *does not* reduce these respective models to a pure rational consciousness.



In searching for responses or prescriptions in the *Zhuangzi*, one finds that there are indeed positive descriptions of engagement that come to settle in the model of sages or *shengren* 聖人. The *Qiwulun* constructs these figures around its critique of *bian*, and, in this respect, they can be read as direct responses to the diagnoses of an epistemological crisis. These are figures who distinguish themselves with an understanding of the scope of our categories, how we go about constructing epistemological claims, and who, upon applying an insight into the nature of dialectic, are able to fend off injury to the heart-mind:

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也...是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。(4/2/27-29)

Of things, there are none that are not 'that' (*bi* 彼); of things, there are none that are not 'this' (*shi* 是). One cannot see 'that,' one knows it only as it is known to oneself. Thus it is said: 'That' emerges from 'this,' 'this' follows from 'that.' 'This' and 'that,' this is the theory of their simultaneous birth....This being the case, sages do not depend/proceed [on any one], but rather illuminate these in Heaven's [light], and in this case too, adapt and judge what is so (...*yin shi* 因是也).

Notwithstanding a more mystical interpretation of this passage, there is a sound basis for tying the reference to *tian* here to a certain kind of dialectical capacity since the 'heavenly' illumination of opposing possibilities is itself defined in terms of a method for making judgments – a judgment that adapts and is thus different from the dialectic of *bian*, but a judgment, a categorization, nonetheless. The text refers to this dialectical unit with the characters *yin shi* – an ascription or judgment of what is so, on a given basis, or one that 'adapts' to a given circumstance, in which things might equally be generated as 'this' (*shi* 是) or 'that' (*bi* 彼). Contrary to the calcified dialectic of *bian*, the sage exhibits a fluidity in the deployment of categories:

[Such a person] does not use a [fixed] definition of what is the case (*wei shi bu yong* 為是不用), but instead lodges it in the usual...This is to adapt and judge what is so (*yin shi* 因是) and stop. Stopping without knowing (*bu zhi* 不知) it to be so, this is called *dao*. (5/2/37)

Crucially, then, the sage does not abandon a dialectical lexicon. The text repeats its injunction against using a fixed, unyielding definition of what is the case – a definition termed as *wei shi* that we have earlier associated with imposing fixed boundaries on *dao* and in our speech. Yet the sages who eschew fixed definitions continue to divide and categorize, except they replace a dialectic of strict binaries (of *shilfei*) with a judgment of 'what is so' that shifts (a judgment classified as *yin shi*). A significant achievement in the *Qiwulun*, then, might be the attempt to account for a positive set of divisions in light of the observation regarding the indexical nature of our claims. Sages emerge in this respect as artful wielders of a dialectic that follows the movement of context, tracing its shifting boundaries which determine a thing to be now both 'this' and 'that,' and, in doing so, protects the heart-mind from the afflictions of a more dangerous method of judgment.

The *therapeutic* quality of this dialectical facility is reinforced in the parable of Cook Ding, which functions as a symbolic counterpart to the more dialectical formulations of the *Qiwulun*. Asked by King Wenhui to describe his superlative abilities in dividing up the bodies of oxen, he charts his progress from an earlier stage



where he sees oxen as discrete entities - whole bodies that are fixed in his field of vision - to a later development where his “knowledge stops” and his “spirit goes wherever it desires (官知止而神欲行)” (7/3/6). In a language that closely resembles the sage’s fluid notation of the world with distinctions, Cook Ding describes how his blade moves without premeditation and effortlessly negotiates the sinews of flesh and bone, striking with an almost musical quality as it divides and cuts up an ox. His particular method of cutting “depends on the natural patters (*tianli* 天理),” and his knife, which is “without thickness (*wu hou* 无厚),” is able to “enter the empty spaces (*ru you jian* 入有間)” within the joints and exercise a kind of free play. The Cook’s concluding remarks and the King’s response are particularly insightful:

Nonetheless, whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to do anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing (*zhi* 視) comes to a complete halt. My activity slows (*xing wei chi* 行為遲), and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then all at once, [the ox] is separated into parts which fall to the ground like clumps of soil. I stand there, blade in hand, and look upon my work all around, dawdling over it with satisfaction. Then I wipe off the blade and put it away.

King Wenhui said, “Excellent! From hearing the Cook’s words, I have learned how to nourish life (*yangsheng* 養生)!”<sup>34</sup>

Multiple iterations of this parable exist across the corpus of Warring States texts. The broader literary context, as scholars have pointed out, attests to the historical significance of cooks as renowned figures, who, through their art, come to be associated with upward mobility and, ultimately, access to political power. The *locus classicus* in this arena is the persona of *Yi Yin* (伊尹) – a legendary cook who transposes his masterful technique in the kitchen to the realm of government and assumes the position of royal minister in the *Shang* court. The exemplarity displayed in the figure of the butcher, then, is understood to be specifically political in nature, and scholars generally situate Zhuangzi’s re-telling of the Cook Ding story within a broader genre of ‘culinary myths’ that equate the art of cooking/butchering with the art of politics.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, what underlies the equation between butchering and successful government is a more expansive conception of abilities – both mental and physical – that diversifies the kinds of activities and persons for which the butcher might serve as a model. In other words, the art of cutting oxen, while it might offer a guide for political praxis, nevertheless exhibits an acumen in a very basic set of capacities that inform and influence how one might think, feel, speak and act toward others.<sup>36</sup> The

<sup>34</sup> Zhuangzi 8/3/9–12 (Following the translation of this passage, with slight modifications, in Zhuangzi 2009, 23)).

<sup>35</sup> The *Huainanzi*, *Guanzi*, and *Hanshu*, for example, recycle the Cook Ding story with many of the same details regarding the specific movement of the blade and the extension of the principles of the butchering art to government. See (Sterckx 2011, 53) for a discussion of the relevant selections from these, and later, texts. (Graziani 2005) and (Kohn 2014) are also indispensable resources in situating the parable in a broader literary context.

<sup>36</sup> This more general application of the butcher analogy is confirmed in the following assessment by Roel Sterckx: “Food metaphors also supplied an assortment of images on which masters of philosophy, literati, officials, pundits, and poets could draw to explore the workings of the human

*Huainanzi* underscores these more basic tenets contained in the image of the butcher by widening the arc covered by culinary myths. It is not only the royal minister that can apply the cook's insights, as we read below, but sages and carpenters too.

Thus the sage shapes and fashions things the way the carpenter chops, pares, drills, and fastens; the way the cook slices, cuts, divides, and separates. Each detail achieves what is appropriate to it, and nothing is broken or harmed. A clumsy artisan is not this way...As for the sage's chopping and paring things, he splits them, he halves them, he separates them, he scatters them.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, all three figures – the sage, the carpenter, and the cook – figure as part of a larger discourse on the efficacy of ritual in political life. But the explicit resonance here between the cutting of an animal carcass and the sage's "chopping and paring [of] things" brings into view the basic ideals of sagehood in relation to thought and speech. The *Huainanzi* passage therefore functions as a useful hermeneutical resource for how we might interpret the Cook Ding passage in the *Zhuangzi*, bridging it, as it were, to the *Qiwulun*, which is primarily about how a sage does *not*, or should *not*, "chop and par[e] things." As a positive model that extends to political life, Cook Ding is equally relevant for thinking about how a sage categorizes the world and applies these categories in and through language. The Cook's description therefore mirrors the technical explanations of the sage's use of criteria in the *Qiwulun*, and it does so most evidently in its treatment of the question of knowledge. Both accounts are premised on evacuating the heart-mind of 'knowledge,' to be associated once again with the dogmatic epistemologies of a culture of debate. The Cook reaches a point where his 'knowing' comes to a halt, and the sage likewise distinguishes what is the case, but stops short of accumulating *zhi* 知.

The therapeutic value of Cook Ding's art, and by extension the art of the sage, is explicit in King Wenhui's exclamation about how, from hearing the Cook, he has learned to "nourish life" (*yangsheng*). The phrase *yangsheng*, as we have seen, belongs in a well-attested medical vernacular shared across the 'cross-fertilized' texts of medicine and philosophy. While the recipe-texts of *Mawangdui* limit the term to a program of macrobiotic hygiene, texts like the *Neiye* develop additional modes of 'nourishing life' that shift the focus away from purely physical ailments and equilibriums to pathologies that concern an unhealthy appetite for knowledge and its impact on the heart-mind. The *Zhuangzi*, with its story of Cook Ding, appears to stake its claim in this cross-fertilized discussion, and it does so in an emphatic manner. Both the cook and the sage we have encountered in the *Qiwulun* (and elsewhere in the Inner Chapters) are interchangeable figures, with the one cutting and dividing along the "natural patterns" of the flesh, and the other cutting and dividing things dialectically according to how they naturally and spontaneously are. To adequately grasp what it might mean to "nourish life" in the *Zhuangzi* requires then that we extend the term's jurisdiction to include the method and agenda of the sage. To

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senses, construct their ideals of sagehood, devise ways to communicate with the spirit world, and formulate regimens for human self-cultivation" (Sterckx 2011, 49).

<sup>37</sup> (Major et al. 2010, Qi Su 齊俗 11.10, 411).

this end, the text can be read as offering an iteration of *yangsheng* practices occupied with constructing a diagnosis of the distinct ailment of a ‘completed heart-mind.’ To ‘nourish life’ involves, first and foremost, a regulation of a distinct kind of appetite and a fixing of dialectical errors.

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The *Phaedrus* offers us a wealth of information regarding the therapeutic methods Plato equips the philosopher-physician with. That this is a principal theme in the dialogue is evident, from the very outset, in the narrative’s peripatetic movement, which begins with Socrates and Phaedrus roaming at the periphery of the city away from its *dromoi*. Phaedrus is the instigator of this outward movement, convinced of the virtues of the countryside as an apt setting in which to memorize a speech of the sophist Lysias. Socrates, though, is a lover of philosophical dialectic, and as a dialectician he is at home in the bustling environs of the *agora*. On account of this displacement from city to countryside, he is “out of place (*atopotatos*)” (228c), and he lays the blame for his disorientation squarely on Phaedrus’ shoulders. “[Y]ou have discovered a drug (*to pharmakon*),” Socrates says of the sophist’s speech, and it is explicitly under the effects of such a *pharmakon* that he emerges in the opening scenes of the dialogue as a figure plagued with sickness. He is “sick with desire” for the speech that Phaedrus conceals and describes himself as a “fellow Bacchic reveler” (228b), in a frenzied state as they begin their walk outside the city walls. Once a few iterations of the speech have been delivered, Socrates will backtrack, disavowing his contributions to the harmful methods of sophistry, and once again claim that he “was drugged and under [Phaedrus’] spell” (242e). Topography in the *Phaedrus*, in other words, belongs not as part of some innocuous mise-en-scène, but instead stands implicated in a diagnosis of sophistry as a kind of intellectual narcosis that impairs or dulls the ability to think and speak.

But if Phaedrus wields the dangerous *pharmakon* of sophistry, Socrates soon enough takes hold of the reins of their conversation and directs their journey through the treacherous terrain of the countryside. Socrates will choose where to “turn off” (229a) the path, and in changing directions, he will always lead the discussion. In his final act of navigation, he will prompt a return to the environs of the city once Phaedrus has been reoriented in that direction (the direction, in other words, of philosophy). To follow the path on which Socrates and Phaedrus tread is then to follow Socrates following Phaedrus, to pursue after a pursuit, wherein the philosopher will attempt to rid the sophist of his poisoned method. And as an act of navigation, Socrates is equally involved in an act of therapy aimed at the disorientation and sickness that pervade the opening scenes of the dialogue.

The therapeutic lens of the *Phaedrus* settles specifically on the problem of sophistic methodology, which, as Socrates’ diagnoses, contains the pathogen of “plausibility” (*to eikos*). Lysias’ speech lacks “the true essence (*tēn ousian*)” of an argument, namely, the condition of *necessity* (*hē anankē*) upon which all claims should rest. Instead, he is censured for proceeding “as if” his arguments follow,

“...resorting to what seems plausible.” Gregory Vlastos has remarked that Socrates’ objection to the sophist’s “iffy theses” brings into view the structure of the “as if[,]” which contains unasserted premises that are equally “unasserted counterfactuals.”<sup>38</sup> Such an elision, in turn, allows the sophist to weave an argument with equal force for contrary positions. In the context of the eristic encounter, which is typical of the sophist’s activity, the chief concern is with winning an argument. To this end, plausibility, as a structural condition, allows for the production of the requisite argument with the greatest facility. Socrates dismisses such forms of argumentation because they are both ethically and epistemologically compromised. The unasserted premise is no more than a mere tool to gain an advantage over an opponent in an eristic context and is thus far from an honest admission of one’s true opinion; stemming from this ethical laxity is the resulting epistemological compromise in which “one’s seriousness in the pursuit of truth”<sup>39</sup> is undermined. We are reminded, once again, of Socrates’ declaration in the *Gorgias* that the sophist’s rhetoric is always potentially mired in “false beliefs” and that the resulting opinions, or *dogmata*, contribute to the “vice of the soul (*hē tēs psukhēs ponēria*)” (454d & 477c-d).

Arguably, then, the crux of the dialogue involves the antidote Socrates offers against the sophist’s faulty dialectic. The correct method, Socrates suggests, masters “two forms” of speech:

Socrates: The first involves someone whose sight can bring into a single form (*eis mian tē idean*) things which have previously been scattered in all directions so that by defining each thing he makes clear any subject he ever wants to teach about. So just now speaking about Eros, we defined what it is, whether well or poorly. The definition, at least, allowed the speech to progress with clarity and internal consistency.

Phaedrus: And what do you say the second form is, Socrates?

Socrates: To have the power, conversely, to cut up (*diatēnein*) a composition, form by form (*kat’eide*), according to its natural joints (*kat’arthra*) and not to attempt to hack through any part, attacking in the manner of a bad butcher (*kakou mageirou*) (*Phaedrus*, 265d-e).

Socrates declares himself to be a lover, an *erastēs*, “of these methods of division and collection (*tov diaireseōn kai sunagōgōv*),” and he invests in them the very “ability to speak and think” (266b). Their importance, especially that of the *diaretical* method, to the overall project of philosophy cannot be overstated. Socrates accordingly identifies the dialectical art, *hē dialektikē*, as the only *tekhnē* that is capable of harnessing and utilizing the power of these methods.

To cut, then, like a *good* butcher, according to the “natural joints” and following the natural ligatures of the flesh, cannot involve the merely plausible division of categories, this way or that, simply to one-up an interlocuter and win a debate. Necessity (*hē anankē*) guides the method of *diairesis*, and Plato’s inclusion of the model of the butcher is meant to instruct us in this logic of *anankē*. Categories, as

<sup>38</sup> (Vlastos 1994, 2, 8).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 9.

they organize our speech and thought, must be made to conform to what is natural, like the given patterns of flesh and bone. The analogy conveys a sense of a language that, through the training and constant exercise of philosophy (i.e. through honing the methods of division and collection), approaches a spontaneous and natural quality. Contrary to the artifice of sophistry, in which language and thinking is purposefully wielded in ways that distort reality, the dialectical cutting carried out by the philosopher's blade must respect the patterns that inhere in nature itself.

But in its commitment to necessity, and to the value of truth in speaking and thinking, the method of *diairesis* is first and foremost a *therapeutic* method. That is, its chief concern is with effecting a remedial practice, one in which the false divisions and collections undertaken by a soul in a state of disease can be corrected and its health can thereby be restored. Socrates makes this abundantly clear when he follows up his discussion of *diairesis* as a cutting along natural joints with the assertion that both philosophy, the true art of rhetoric, and medicine "function in the same way" (270b). While medicine works to "instill health and strength using drugs and diet," dialectic similarly "imparts excellence (*aretēn*) and persuasion...by means of words" (ibid.). We have already noted the 'semantic stretch' which is at work here, and which allows Plato to bring a medical lexicon into the fold of philosophy. However, what is noteworthy in the *Phaedrus* is the further elaboration of a philosophical therapy along methodological lines. Socrates goes beyond simply a medical analogy, establishing parity between dialectical division-making and the application of drugs and diet. Both methods engender states of excellence (*aretē*), which correspond to states of health (*hugieia*) on the somatic and noetic registers.

But Socrates does not rest his case there. He makes the association between medical and philosophical methods clearer still when he famously equates "how Hippocrates and the true account (*ho alēthes logos*) speak about the nature of something" (270c). Both the Hippocratic method and the method of 'true speaking' entail a basic set of steps that constitute a more elaborate definition of *diairesis*: first, there is the inquiry into "whether a nature is simple or multi-formed (*haploun e polueides*) with respect to that which we wish to be experts" (270d); second, if it is a simple form, its "innate potential or capacity" must be considered; if the form is complex and multiple, each of its individual forms must be counted and examined as was the case with a simple form (i.e. with respect to its innate potential). Hippocratic and dialectical methods, in other words, both appear to follow an intricate process of division, by which forms or kinds of things are examined along lines of symmetry and classified accordingly. The Hippocratic physician engages in the method in order to understand the nature of a bodily disease, accurately diagnose a pathology and marshal the cure of drugs and a regimen. The philosopher's engagement, likewise, is motivated less by a disinterested pursuit of truth as some pure abstraction and rather by the urgent need of a cure for activities of speaking and thinking that are ridden with diseases of the soul.

## 7 Eros and Emptiness – A Parting of Ways

The discussion of therapeutic models in Plato and Zhuangzi appears to suggest that the two figures share a common concern not only in their diagnostic sensibilities, but equally so in the kinds of therapeutic methods they offer. Plato associates the true, philosophical argument with a dialectic that divides or separates on the basis of necessity or *anankē*. *Diairesis*, this true art of division-making, is moreover the method that both the Hippocratic doctor and the philosopher employ in administering a cure for diseases of the body and the soul, respectively. Plato elaborates on this therapeutic method using the image of the cook who learns all the ligatures and joints in the flesh and drives his cleaver along these naturally given divisions. Zhuangzi's Cook Ding, too, symbolizes a confluence of similar themes and concerns. He strikes at the joints and uses the naturally given patterns (*tian li* 天理) in the flesh to guide the movement of his blade. Likewise, the sage cuts and divides things as they naturally emerge and stops short of identifying them with rigid, dogmatic categories. Crucially, both the butcher and the sage are involved in a therapeutic practice that strives to “nourish life.”

Yet, there are differences that lurk in the ostensible similarities between these two models. For Zhuangzi, the act of cutting remains a highly circumscribed exercise to the extent that our dialectical ‘poverty’ prevents us from performing any final act of division that might generate a singular, ultimate set of truths. While we can divide along the natural patterns, these patterns remain too numerous and rich to be able to grasp in their totality.<sup>40</sup> At most, the text celebrates the capacity to find a perfect match with the patterns in a given situation. We thus move from the possibility of a perfect division, as such, to a perfectly *adequate* division that matches the particular context in question. Furthermore, as a *therapeutic* exercise, the division making art of the butcher and the sage focuses on moderating a dialectical operation that continually threatens to pull the self into a noetic disorder, afflicting both thought and speech. The butcher intervenes by moderating this activity – he literally ‘slows’ it down – and beyond his momentary engagement, he suspends his activity and puts away his blade until it is called upon again. Sages who wield their dialectical blade must also engage in a similarly nimble activity, supplying criteria, making distinctions, but also repeatedly suspending their dialectic and continually revising their categories. It is this momentary suspension into which the butcher and sage must frequently retreat that the authors of the *Zhuangzi* arguably endow with the greatest therapeutic potential. It is clear that one central dimension to this therapy is in tending to the pathologies of the completed heart-mind, and here the emphasis of “stopping” or “ceasing” relates directly to curing a kind of epistemological excess (a “knowing too much”). But a therapeutic program can continue in the absence of illness too, and it is in this capacity that we should grasp the truly positive force of

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<sup>40</sup> Franklin Perkins draws our attention to this point in his claim that, according to the *Zhuangzi*, “our capabilities are limited while the patterns [理] that can be known are limitless.” (Perkins 2014, 210).

the sage as an attendant, as one who oversees an active regimen of nourishment. Here, the moment of suspension, where the sage retreats before knowledge starts to accumulate, also serves as a moment of creative insight in which the continual revision and renewal of dialectic equips one with an ability to explore multiple perspectives and possibilities.

It is in keeping with these qualities of restraint that the *Zhuangzi* further develops its model of “nourishing life” with the exercise of *zuowang* 坐忘 (“sitting and forgetting”), described in the following exchange between Yan Hui and Confucius:

I am making progress.  
 What do you mean?  
 I have forgotten Benevolence and Righteousness.  
 That’s good, but you are still not there.  
 ...I just sit and forget.  
 What do you mean, you sit and forget?  
 My limbs and torso falling away, my sensory intelligence dismissed, dispersing my form, my knowledge removed – [then] I am the same as the Great Transformation. This is what I call just sitting and forgetting.<sup>41</sup>

To forget (*wang* 忘), then, is to undertake a kind of divesting of one’s categories, ridding the heart-mind of an epistemology plagued by calcified, dogmatic leftovers that cannot accommodate the shifting boundaries of one’s experience. The *Zhuangzi* appropriates the discourse of the Confucians and, in a masterful ploy, has their best disciple, Yan Hui, sit and “forget” the grand principles of benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義). Rather than a purely anti-rational state, as some scholars tend to suggest,<sup>42</sup> ‘forgetting’ involves a continual cycle in which categories are revised, applied, and then ‘forgotten.’ To this end, the practice exhibits the therapeutic intentions of the text, cleansing the heart-mind with a strict dialectical regimen.

Zhuangzi’s insistence on the limited scope for the dialectical method of division stands in sharp contrast to the insatiable appetite for making divisions we find in the figure of Socrates and those under his influence. The latter show none of the philosophical reserve that defines Zhuangzi’s sage, and, quite to the contrary, they are infamous for their commitment to endless days and sympotic nights of

<sup>41</sup> *Zhuangzi* 17/6/92 (Following Ziporyn’s translation, with slight modifications, in (Zhuangzi 2009)).

<sup>42</sup> Brian Eno, for example, identifies ‘forgetting’ and its corresponding state of ‘emptiness (*xu* 虛)’ in the *Zhuangzi* with an explicitly logophobic position. Xu Keqian also subscribes to the thesis of logophobia, equating ‘emptiness’ with the “individual spirit” that is devoid of conceptual thought. See (Eno 1996, 131) and (Xu 2011, 449). But forgetting the principles of benevolence and righteousness and divesting the mind of knowledge, *zhi* 知, does not necessarily entail a complete cessation of categorization and judgment. Indeed, if we keep in mind that the concerns in the *Zhuangzi* are with a certain pathological mode of thinking and speaking (that is, the mode of *bian*), then the practice of ‘forgetting’ is directly aimed at these noetic disorders. When Huizi presses Zhuangzi on his claim that human beings do not have *qing* 情, the central feature or “inclination” that is assumed to distinguish them above all the other ten thousand things, the latter replies with the assertion that “affirmation (saying something is so / *shi* 是) and negation (saying something is not so / *fei* 非) are...*qing* 情” (*Zhuangzi*, 15/5/57). The capacity to forget, then, secures this naturally empty state, defined by the absence of the fixed dialectic of *shi* 是 and *fei* 非 (and not by the absence of thought as such).



philosophical conversation. Socrates seals this commitment when he speaks of himself as a “lover (*erastēs*)” of the method of *diairesis*, and his *erotic* motivations diverge remarkably from those underpinning an exercise like *zuowang*. How, then, does this additional attribute of *eros* affect a methodology and a mandate that we have come to recognize as fundamentally therapeutic in nature?

In the *Symposium*, Diotima disabuses Socrates of the idea that *Eros* is the most beautiful of all divinities, instead referring to him as a “spirit (*to daimonion*) [who] is in between (*metaxu*) gods and mortals” (202d-e). For all his resourcefulness, *Eros* is equally a figure of dire poverty, bound to a position of wanting that which he does not, and cannot, have. His intellectual disposition in turn betrays a “middling”<sup>43</sup> quality, as he is always “in the middle, in between wisdom and ignorance” (203e). The philosopher, shot through with the arrow of *Eros*, must of necessity negotiate this inheritance too. Diotima thus draws Socrates’ attention to the philosopher’s middling disposition, in which *Eros* swells as the “desire of the good” (207a). Beset with his constitutional inadequacies, the philosopher then relates to this highest form of knowledge only in the manner of a pursuit. His method is one that propagates a desire, and, to this end, is not to be mistaken for its fulfillment. The language of the *Symposium* accordingly shifts its emphasis to a discussion of the importance of “un-forgetting (*a-lēthein*).” For caught between the poles of ignorance and wisdom, the erotic space in which philosophy unfolds always involves a potential forgetting (*lethe*), an “exodus of knowledge (*epistēmēs eksodos*)” (208a) that must be fenced off. And it is through the erotic act of a “speaking” and an “asking,” an act that transposes the sexual encounter of the non-philosopher on to the register of a dialectical encounter, that this “middling” knowledge comes to be safeguarded in a pursuit without an end.

Plato’s abstraction of the logic of *eros* does nothing to rid the condition of its pathological properties. To be an erotic figure, whether on the somatic or the noetic plane, is to suffer from a disease.<sup>44</sup> In this context, Socrates sheds his therapist’s cloak and, in a startling twist to the plot I have laid out, exchanges it for the garb of a patient. If one appreciates the therapeutic lexicon that Plato so meticulously constructs, one must now face the possibility that the philosopher is a purveyor of spells and charms whose benefit is not immediately apparent. And so, in the *Phaedrus*, where we have encountered the definitive statement of the philosopher’s therapeutic program, we are simultaneously confronted with its very reversal. *Eros* is a divinely dispensed *mania*, Socrates tells Phaedrus, and he compares the approach of the

<sup>43</sup> Following Avi Sharon’s translation of the language of *metaxu* in relation to the philosopher’s capacity for knowledge. See (Plato 1998, 53).

<sup>44</sup> Anne Carson has shown how, across the genres of poetic, mythological, dramatic, sophistic and philosophic writing in ancient Greece, we find authors wrestling with the conundrum that *eros* presents. In particular, she points to a basic logic of ambivalence that is synonymous with an erotic experience, and that is in turn associated with a state of pathology. Here, the poets offer the most vivid expression of this logic and its devastating effects on the physiological plane. See (Carson 2014). In David Halperin’s estimation, Plato’s achievement is precisely this move toward an abstraction of the erotic logic, and this makes him “the first person in Western history to formulate a theory of erotic desire[.]” (Halperin 2005, 51).

lover to the beloved as that of a soul that “finds in him the only doctor for her greatest labors and pains” (252b).

## 8 Conclusion

The method of division that so effectively cures the pathology of a sophistic dialectic therefore also clears the way for a pursuit that has no end. Such an erotic practice transforms the philosopher from a doctor of our “greatest diseases” into a practitioner that now emerges as a victim of a yet additional order of sickness. In his deployment of a language of *eros*, Plato might in fact accommodate for Zhuangzi’s insight into the pathology of pursuing an exhausted catalog of divisions - a final, perfected state of knowledge - that is symptomatic of the condition of *chengxin* 成心, the “completed heartmind.” But where such an insight translates into the limited mandate of philosophical activity in the *Zhuangzi*, Plato accommodates for the sickness of philosophy by identifying its etiology as divine in origin. In doing so, however, the philosopher’s exercise sheds its therapeutic intent and commits itself to an order of *mania* or madness.

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# Chapter 31

## On Beastly Joys and Melancholic Passions: Cross-Species Communication of Affects in Spinoza and the *Zhuangzi*



Sonya Özbey

### 1 Introduction

There is a long history of reading Spinoza together with Asian philosophical texts and especially with canonical Chinese texts. Certainly, this practice has its roots in early modern Christian missionary expansion in China, which brought with it controversies about the extent to which the Chinese should be charged with atheism.<sup>1</sup> Due to the difficulties that came with cross-cultural transmission of ideas and concerns, it was not uncommon to construe the Chinese in the image of a figure that was more familiar to European intellectuals: Spinoza.<sup>2</sup> Centuries later, Spinoza is still often juxtaposed with Chinese philosophical traditions, but this time not because of their perceived shared heresies, but because of their perceived shared wisdom in

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This essay has benefitted greatly from comments made by Tad Schmaltz on an earlier version and from the suggestions of anonymous reviewers on a later version. I am also thankful for the editorial suggestions of Christopher Ahn.

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<sup>1</sup>For more on this, see Thijs Weststeijn (Weststeijn 2007: 537–561).

<sup>2</sup>One of Spinoza's own contemporaries, Pierre Bayle, considered Spinozism as “none other than a particular way of interpreting a doctrine widely diffused in the Indies”; he followed this with another comparison between Spinoza's philosophy and Chinese Buddhism (Bayle 1734, Spinoza entry followed by *remarque* B, where he examines Chinese “Foe Kiao” [*Fojiao* 佛教]). Similarly, the seventeenth-century philosopher Malebranche construed the image of Neo-Confucianism in the image of Spinoza on the grounds that they both exhibited similar kinds of “impieties,” namely, atheism (Malebranche 1980: 98).

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avoiding the alleged conceptual failures of the Western philosophical canon.<sup>3</sup> In this new iteration of comparative analysis, which initially was adopted by environmental philosophers, the alleged similarities between Spinoza and Chinese thinkers largely boil down to their alleged dismantling of human arrogance (because due to their “atheism,” they did not think that humans are created in God’s image) and their supposed emphasis on harmony with nature (thanks to, the argument goes, the absence of certain God-given transcendent principles to distinguish humans from all they managed to dominate). Another perceived similarity concerns the so-called “monistic” outlook of Spinoza’s philosophy and all of early Chinese traditions, which are often construed as greener pastures in the field of world philosophies.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, the habit of locating the main features of Spinoza’s works or Asian textual traditions solely in terms of their departures from Western orthodoxy has brought with it a high degree of the amalgamation of these texts. Such broad-stroke interpretive approaches also inevitably overdetermine the findings of a comparative inquiry by formulating the points of convergence and divergence between texts and traditions in terms of higher order metaphysical constructs. Moreover, viewing the absence of a radical ontological “dualism” as the collapse of the entire system onto one side of a dualism (“it is all about relationality, not individuality,” “it is all about affect, not reason,” “it is all about continuity with nature, not anthropocentrism”) simultaneously betrays the strength of the dogma which asserts that if something makes no difference at the level of absolute concepts, then it makes no difference whatsoever.<sup>5</sup>

This essay too juxtaposes Spinoza’s *Ethics* and a classical Chinese work, the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>6</sup> The reasons to focus on these two texts are manifold. My goal is partly to engage mimetically with a well-known interpretative paradigm and follow the same strategy of reading Spinoza’s corpus with a “non-Western” text, but to do so

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<sup>3</sup>Well-known examples of both drawing parallels between Spinoza and Chinese schools of thought and presenting them as better alternatives to Western thinking habits are works by Arne Naess and George Sessions (Naess 1995: 151–155; Sessions 1995: 156–184). Such interpretive parallels certainly function as yet another version of erasing differences among the “others” of the philosophical canon, except that they are now being celebrated for their wisdom, rather than being condemned for their heresy.

<sup>4</sup>It goes without saying that the labels “monism” and “dualism” emerged out of a specific and Christo-European context, but have been popularized in American comparative philosophy circles by David Hall (Hall 1993: 118–19). One wonders how hermeneutically justified it is to use such labels for Chinese figures when all classical Chinese philosophical traditions technically fall into that category, which makes it a non-category that tells us little about how the *Mengzi* differs from the *Laozi*. To make matters worse, the applicability of the labels immanentism and monism to Spinoza’s system has also been challenged. Yitzhak Melamed points out that although Spinoza is not a mind-body dualist, he is still a dualist of Thought and Being (Melamed 2013: 636–683).

<sup>5</sup>Certainly, the inclination to read Chinese philosophical traditions as valuing the undervalued side of the so-called Western dualisms is not confined to the English-speaking academy. For example, FANG Dongmei defends a well-known account of this reading paradigm (Fang 1980).

<sup>6</sup>For ease of discussion, I shall henceforth refer to texts produced and compiled during the classical and early imperial periods as early or ancient “Chinese” texts, although the conceptual creation of cultural unity was a gradual and later development.

in a way that effects an interpretive shift that strips the common and unifying labels used for them (e.g., monistic, immanentist) of their descriptive power.<sup>7</sup> After all, the texts in question inherited different philosophical terminologies, reacted against different concerns, and had different attitudes toward organized human life. A comparative analysis of them around the issue of the human-animal binary can thus help reveal the different types of argumentative mechanisms that blur or solidify this binary. Hence, ultimately, instead of speculating on what kind of conceptual distinctions are expected to unfold from a metaphysical system (however we label it), this essay examines some of the actual articulations of the human-animal binary in the two comparanda and traces interconnections between different threads of thought in a given text. In the end, through this comparison I intend to allow the two sets of texts to pull against each other in order to enrich our understanding of the intricacy of the apparatuses behind various conceptions humanity and animality.

It is inevitable that one's chosen comparanda embody specific interests and concerns. When it comes to the range of themes that are typically explored in relation to conceptualizations of human-animal relations, I am less interested in proving the untenability of a human-animal binary than exploring the complex machinery behind ambivalent attitudes toward this binary. This very interest informed my decision to focus on texts that vacillate between blurring and asserting the human-animal split, which I believe is what Spinoza's oeuvre and the *Zhuangzi* do. Of course, since both sets of texts are philosophically very rich and the topic of the human-animal split is relatively broad, for the purposes of this essay I will limit myself to the affective and hedonic aspects of the human-animal binary in Spinoza's *Ethics* and the *Zhuangzi*. Special attention will be paid to the presence and absence of an anxiety around communication of affects between humans and animals in these two texts. As I will argue, one of the main reasons behind the two different attitudes has to do with the presence or absence of another thread of thought that concerns ideals of human unity and engagement with purposive, institutionalized politics. In a similar vein, we see that animality, at times, serves as a rhetorical trope, and the ways in which it is envisioned can be inflected by commitments to cement human society and to guard it against certain perceived threats.

The first section of this essay opens with some of the well-known passages in the *Zhuangzi*, where the likes and dislikes of different beings are compared. The section examines the ways in which the text mobilizes curiosity about different beings' tastes and preferences to both blur and affirm a human-animal binary—which perhaps destabilizes one's distinctions and groupings even more than a consistent denial of the binary. In the end, what unites these episodes in the *Zhuangzi* is a concern to develop sensitivity to a multiplicity of different vantage points, which results in a greater degree of efficacious action. In the second section, the essay changes gears and demonstrates, through Spinoza, that similar kinds of

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<sup>7</sup>My strategy here echoes Luce Irigaray's mimetic engagement with the history of philosophy. Irigaray's essay "This Sex Which Is Not One," published in her collection of essays of the same name, provides a clear example of mimetic engagement, in which Irigaray demonstrates the limitations of certain gendered categories by purposefully assuming them (Irigaray 1985: 23–33).

cross-species comparisons can also be taken in a completely different direction, in which the differences among various beings are discussed within the framework of an exhortation to distance ourselves from those whose affects and preferences are deemed to be different from ours. Whereas part of this attitude has to do with the fact that Spinoza associates animality with lower intellectual and affective powers, which then informs his vision of human flourishing, his related commitment to cementing human society also gives way to an “us versus them” split. Within that disjunctive approach, animality either features as a literal threat to human flourishing (especially if one starts empathizing with animals’ suffering) or as a trope for disorder and violence.

The third and final section discusses further ramifications of our findings. It is significant that the two texts employ different models of human flourishing (one gives rise to Spinoza’s investment in human togetherness and the other to the *Zhuangzi*’s apathy toward it) and consequently react to two different kinds of threats to humans’ thriving. As the section demonstrates, neither Spinoza’s investment in human bonding nor the *Zhuangzi*’s disinterest in forging unity and solidarity among people is trivial. Spinoza’s commitment to cementing human society is particularly what enables him to police species-borders. This by itself demonstrates that, although neither Spinoza nor the *Zhuangzi* argues for or against humans’ bonding with other animals by appealing to certain God-given transcendent principles or moral values, the disappearance of the supra-natural status of humans does not also bring with it the disappearance of the significance of the human world for Spinoza. In contrast to this approach, we see an apathetic stance toward human bonding in the *Zhuangzi*. This, however, is intertwined with its divestment from human welfare as a collective goal altogether. Hence, although there is much to celebrate about the ways in which the *Zhuangzi* often upends, if not dissolves, the human-animal opposition, the same layers of the text also offer us a glimpse into the cost of undermining all familiar distinctions, such as decreased engagement with institutionalized politics.

## 2 Wandering with the Fish: Human and Animal Affects in the *Zhuangzi*

The “classic of anti-classicism,”<sup>8</sup> the *Zhuangzi*, is known for many and sometimes contradictory things. These include its downplaying (if not outright mockery) of argumentative reasoning while presenting us with some of the most provocative ideas to chew on, its lampooning of *and* homage to rival texts and thinkers, and its overall tone as a text that combines sober reasoning and playfulness. In addition, just as with any other early Chinese text that went through processes of addition, subtraction, and adaptation, which sometimes take over a century, the *Zhuangzi* too

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<sup>8</sup>The description belongs to Haun Saussy (Saussy 2017: 60).



presents us with a multivocal structure and a range of different positions on the topics it discusses.<sup>9</sup> However, what differentiates the *Zhuangzi* from many other examples of early Chinese masters' works is that it does not seek to lay claim to credibility and it deliberately embraces multivocality as a philosophical position.

The *Zhuangzi* largely mobilizes story-telling to multiply the vantage points from which one can view different phenomena. This approach seems to inform the texts' deployment of a great variety of animal imageries. In fact, As Liu Chengji once counted, the *Zhuangzi* includes references to birds of 22 species, 15 kinds of aquatic life, 32 species of land animals, 18 kinds of insects, as well as 37 kinds of plants, and 34 species of fantastic divine creatures (Liu 2002: 381). What primarily motivates this level of interest in many different life forms is not simply the desire to enliven our poetic imagination *à la* the *Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing* 詩經), but to entertain how life might seem to different beings and to try to view them in their own terms, without moralizing their behavior or tier them against humans.

A well-known example of a reflection about the diversity of perspectives and experiences appears in the context of a conversation between Nie Que and Wang Ni, in which the latter is asked whether there is anything that all things affirm to be right. Wang Ni responds:

When people sleep in a damp place, their waists get sore and twisted to death, but is this so of loaches? If people live in trees, they tremble with worry and fear, but is this so of monkeys? Of these three, which one knows the right place to live? People eat the flesh of their livestock, elk and deer eat grass, snakes relish centipedes, owls and crows crave mice. Of these four, which one knows the right thing to eat? Monkeys take their females for mates, elk and deer pair up, loaches play with fish. Now, Mao Qiang and Lady Li are taken to be beautiful by humans, but when fish see them they dive deep, when birds see them they soar into the skies, when elk and deer see them they run away. Which of these four knows what is rightly alluring in the world?<sup>10</sup> (Guo 2012, 2:96–102)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Esther Klein has recently challenged—with success—even the idea that the “inner chapters” might have come from a single hand (Klein 2011: 299–369). This view forms a contrast to the formerly accepted hypothesis that at least the first seven chapters of the anthology might be written by one author. Throughout the book I also avoid making claims about a historical Zhuangzi. In fact, given the way the text mocks other texts using mimicry, it is possible that the name of the text is a humorous salute to the tradition of naming a collection of writings after a sagacious master whose ideas it is intended to capture—except that, in this case, we know virtually nothing about a historical Zhuangzi (Master Zhuang).

<sup>10</sup> After pointing to the existence of such different perspectives about the functional and aesthetic features of things, Wang Ni and Nie Que conclude that under such divergent views one can neither be sure of what “humanity” and “righteousness” (*ren yi* 仁義) might refer to, nor one can distinguish benefit (*li* 利) from harm (*hai* 害). Whereas the former conceptual pair was associated with the Ru discourse, the latter pair makes frequent appearances in the *Mozì*. Here it should be noted that, throughout this essay, I follow the common practice of using the term Ru 儒, rather than “Confucianism,” to designate the group of scholars and intellectuals that may or may not directly label themselves as followers of Confucius, but who had expertise in traditional texts and ceremonial practices.

<sup>11</sup> Citations of the *Zhuangzi* provide the book number and page references to Guo Qingfan (Guo 2012). I consulted translations of Victor Mair and Brook Ziporyn when translating passages from the *Zhuangzi* (Mair 1994; Zhuangzi 2020).

Wang Ni's response to Nie Que aims to demonstrate the silliness of taking one's own judgments as the standard, since one would find among different creatures obvious disagreements over the proper criteria for comfort, gastronomical pleasures, and beauty. The text, which is rich with explicit affirmations of such differences, challenges the centrality of the human perspective by considering it to be on par with the perspectives of other creatures. Of course, the passages that compare the likes and dislikes of different animals could also be read allegorically, treating the literal references to animals as metaphorical placeholders for humans to indicate diversity within the human community.<sup>12</sup>

A well-known instance of an argumentative gesture that puts the difference between two people on par with the difference between a human and an animal appears in what is often referred to as the "happy fish" passage. The passage features a dialogue between the character of Zhuangzi and his friend Huizi, which unfolds as follows:

Zhuangzi and Huizi were wandering (*you* 遊) on the Hao bridge. Zhuangzi says: "The fish come out and swim at ease (*you* 遊), this is the joy of fish." Huizi says: "You are not a fish, whence do you know about the joy of fish?" Zhuangzi answers: "You are not me, how do you know that I do not know about the joy of fish? Huizi says: "I am not you, surely I do not know you; you surely are not a fish, so you do not know the joy of fish, that is the whole point." Zhuangzi says: "Let's go back to your original point. You said 'whence do you know about the joy of fish?'—that presupposes you know that I know it [the joy of fish] and asked me [about it]. I know it from above the Hao river." (Guo 2012, 17: 605–606)

Zhuangzi utilizes Huizi's mode of argumentation against him to point out that his initial question relied on the assumption that he was able to know what Zhuangzi was thinking.<sup>13</sup> Although the entire dialogue here is carried out in a humorous and playful way, we can see an ongoing concern in the text about what one can and cannot know about the world (which includes other beings' dispositions, experiences, and vantage points). Though it is not obvious in the aforementioned passage how much each knows about the fish and about each other, it is clear that everyone involved in the story is engaging in a similar activity. This is perhaps especially true considering the fact that the two words *you* 遊 (to wander, to roam) and *you* 游 (to swim) were also often used interchangeably in early Chinese texts and are etymologically connected with each other.<sup>14</sup> This lingual and notional affinity underscores

<sup>12</sup>I do not take the literal and allegorical interpretations of an episode to be mutually exclusive. Traditional commentaries on the *Zhuangzi*'s "animal anecdotes" do not fall on either side of an interpretive divide, that is, viewing animal anecdotes to be primarily allegories about the human condition versus taking them to be genuine reflections on animal life and how it contrasts with that of humans. At times we see commentaries that side with the latter interpretational choice (Guo 2012, 17: 605–606), at times with the former (Guo 2012, 17: 598), and at times with both (giving both a literal and an allegorical reading of an animal anecdote) (Guo 2012, 4: 173).

<sup>13</sup>In addition, Zhuangzi's final reply ("I know it from Hao river") is also a wordplay on *an* 安 (whence).

<sup>14</sup>The *you* 游 in both *you* 遊 and *you* 游 refers to "pendants of a banner" and connotes a sense of flowing or floating (Baxter and Sagart 2014: 122, 372). When making etymological notes, I will largely be building on the system of Old Chinese reconstruction developed by William Baxter and

the similarity between what Zhuangzi, Huizi, and the fish are all doing: wandering, be it in the water or on the Hao bridge.<sup>15</sup> However, the fact that the character of Zhuangzi later qualifies his claim that the fish seem joyful, by adding that they seem so only from where he is standing, suggests an acknowledgement that the fish might be both like *and* unlike him—but we could perhaps say the same for Huizi. Thus, the passage can be taken to affirm both the idea that we are all similar *and* we are all “others” to one another.

The two threads that run through the text, one pointing in the direction of a human-animal difference (as seen in Wang Ni’s comparison of humans’ and fishes’ criteria for beauty) and the other telling us that we are all simply others to one another can be explained in several ways. The relatively easy explanation would be to simply point out that the *Zhuangzi* was written over a period of time by multiple authors who may not have been as like-minded as we might want to assume. One could also attempt to reconcile the two views into a larger, overarching view by suggesting that these comparisons between humans and animals as groups *and* the gesture of putting the differences between two humans on par with the difference between a human and a fish unfold out of the same simple aim to induce epistemic humility in general. After all, it is through cultivating an awareness of the limits of our knowledge that we can acknowledge we perhaps do not know much about others’ affective states—whether the other is a human or an animal. Moreover, sometimes referring to humans as a group and at other times emphasizing the diversity among humans are not necessarily contradictory gestures, since one could argue that humans as a group simply enjoy more diversity than fish do. One could even push the emphasis on intra-human diversity in the direction of arguing that humans’ differences from each other *are* what make them human.

Another possible interpretive route is to embrace the tension between the two views (one view endorses and one view disturbs the human-animal binary *and* human identity), and to interpret this tension as a possible attempt to hijack the desire to give a coherent and finalizing reading of these distinctions and groupings (because, after all, what is more unsettling than sometimes affirming and sometimes negating a distinction?).<sup>16</sup> Such a gesture would serve to destabilize “human” identity altogether, where both the ordinary earthliness of humans and their seeming oddity when compared to other earthlings are incorporated. Regardless of the interpretational framework one follows, the comparisons that the text makes between the

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Laurant Sagart and will focus on the history of the word, instead of the graphic components of a character. For a criticism of the latter form of speculation, see Paul Goldin (Goldin 2020: 286n2).

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that “you 遊” is a recurring term in the *Zhuangzi* (in fact, it appears in the title of the opening chapter of the transmitted text) and seems to have an affinity with two other recurring motifs in the text: *wuwei* 無為 (non-purposive action) and *ziran* 自然 (so of its own).

<sup>16</sup> This purposeful ambivalence is, in fact, employed for the Heaven(ly)-human distinction, which the text then muddies by asking whether we could know what is from Heaven and what is from human. Ziporyn makes a similar point when he states that the *Zhuangzi* avoids the problem of “instantiation by negation” by dwelling in doubt (Ziporyn 2013: 169).

preferences and pleasures of humans and various animals serve a clear function, namely, providing a critique of imposing one's own set of standards onto others.

Keeping in mind the sentiment conveyed by Wang Ni, the attempt to employ certain distinctions (whether these are distinctions between right and wrong, or beautiful and ugly) in a pan-contextual way is often criticized in the text. Given that different beings have different preferences, one can easily see how generalizing one's own likes and dislikes to others could breed communication failures. The text is notably rich with bleak stories in which displays of even the most well-intentioned, sympathetic acts of care end up harming others. Examples include the story of Hundun, a creature with no eyes, ears, nose, or mouth, who dies after its friends open seven holes in its head as a favor, thinking this is something Hundun would want (Guo 2012, 7: 315); or the story of the bird who dies as a result of a nobleman's efforts to make it happy by feeding it human food and entertaining it with human music (Guo 2012, 18: 619–621). At the root of both Hundun's and the bird's unfortunate deaths lies people's presumption that their own preferences and tastes are universal and thus must be shared by everyone.

It is no coincidence that these stories of failed communication often appear in the context of extending one's standards of appropriateness to other parties with a kind of confidence that is sometimes physically aggressive. The story of Hundun could easily be read alongside other stories of physical mutilation, where people's noses or feet are cut off, or their faces are tattooed, because they do not live up to certain expectations that society places on them (Guo 2012, 6: 284–287). As for the bird, though it is easier to see how inappropriate nourishment could kill a bird, it might not be immediately obvious that exposing a bird to human music could harm it. Concerning early Chinese views of human music and its possible impact on other beings, Roel Sterckx points out that music was thought by some to have a moral force (Sterckx 2002: 124), and observes that “domestication of the animal world and the triumph of human governance over the natural world at large were presented as a process of moral transformation rather than an act of physical conquest” (Sterckx 2002: 123). Given that aesthetics and morality were often intertwined, especially in early Ru discourse, it is not surprising that the authors' wariness of the imposition of certain aesthetic standards parallels their critique of the norm-imposing character of moral discourses. Of course, one might ask here, what makes the character of Zhuangzi, who judges the fish to be joyful, different from a nobleman playing human music to make a bird happy? Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that the former does not assume that because something is enjoyable for him, it should be enjoyable for the fish as well, and hence he does not try to force the fish to take a stroll on the Hao bridge. This certainly presupposes a difference between the character of Zhuangzi and the fish: although they are all *you*'ing (遊; to wander), they *you* in different circumstances.

This latter reading still relies on the assumption that humans are more similar to each other than they are to fish, but given the general criticism of assimilative assumptions of similarity between one and the other (as we see in the story of Hundun), it seems that a line remains between giving provisional definitions of various groupings and giving stable and normative definitions of them. It should also be

added here that the passages hinting at diversity among people include stories about awe-inspiring folks who manifest excellent adaptability to different circumstances, including circumstances that require the mimicry of nonhuman beings. Examples include a cicada catcher who cultivates the ability to stand like a tree in the forest and a swimmer who leads an aquatic lifestyle that is suitable for turtles and fish (Guo 2012, 19: 637–639, 654–656). Although it is tempting to interpret these stories as instances of letting go of one's humanity, one could also argue that being radically flexible is part of being human, which is to suggest that the cicada catcher's using his body like a tree, or the swimmer's ability to swim like fish and turtles, is, in fact, part of the human experience.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of what one makes of the proto-species distinctions in the *Zhuangzi*, or the lack thereof, there seems to be a genuine curiosity about how things might seem to different life forms and an agreement that we should not be too sure about the rightness of our tastes and preferences, unless we want to make fools of ourselves or end up harming others in our attempts to please them. Hence, we might say that the feeling of uncertainty induced by one's awareness of different tastes and preferences has the benefit of generating a healthy doubt that brings out increased attentiveness to the idiosyncrasies of different situations. However, attuned sensitivity to the preferences of other beings is not the only direction one could take after acknowledging differences. One could also read differences in terms of an "us versus them" split and mobilize the situation to alienate the affects of others. This line of thought is at times employed by Spinoza. However, instead of being concerned about assimilative and, at times, counterproductively harmful engagement with other beings, Spinoza fears that we might harm ourselves by worrying too much about "those" he deems to be different from "us." The following section examines two passages in which this sentiment is explicitly expressed, and discusses some of the assumptions and possible motivations behind this argumentative move.

### 3 Choosing Eve Over the Serpent: Human and Animal Affects in Spinoza

Spinoza has long been celebrated for rejecting biblical claims of human superiority—a trait that is rooted partly in the gradual prevalence of certain secular perspectives in early modern Europe.<sup>18</sup> He famously warns against situating humans in

<sup>17</sup>This point goes against Robert Eno's suggestion that the cicada catcher's "body replicates an object of nature apart from humanity" and "conduit[s] away from the human perspective into a holistic engagement with nature" (Eno 1996: 141–42). One can also argue that what makes us human is our ability to be not like a human. For an example of this argument, see Franklin Perkins' discussion of how humans' exceptional status in the *Zhuangzi* might be located in their freedom from being human (Perkins 2010).

<sup>18</sup>These include the gradual replacement of scripture-based argumentation with experimental research, as well as the development of the concept of a mechanical universe that saw the retire-

nature as a “dominion within a dominion,” where humans are thought to disturb the natural order as the sole possessors of mind, rather than follow the mechanistic laws of nature like everything else (Spinoza 1988: EIIIpref).<sup>19</sup> The fact that Spinoza distributed the powers of the mind to everything and placed humans back where they belong—that is, in nature—certainly does not require that he dismantle species borders altogether. On the contrary, due to his association of animality with lower intellectual and affective powers, his discussions of the cross-species communication of affects betray a desire to police species-borders.

A stark example of this can be seen in a passage on human freedom, in which Spinoza presents a very peculiar interpretation of the story of the Fall. The passage reads:

And so we are told that (...) the man having found a wife who agreed completely with his nature, he knew that there could be nothing in nature more useful to him than she was; but when he believed that the beasts were like himself, he immediately began to imitate their affects (see IIP27) and to lose his freedom. (Spinoza 1988: EIVp68s)

What is wrong with identifying with the affects of beasts and how is that tied to Adam’s loss of his freedom? Spinoza’s treatment of affects is intimately tied to his theory of knowledge, where the mind’s inadequate understanding of the causes of its experiences becomes the source of passive affects (i.e., passions).<sup>20</sup> For Spinoza, the more adequately we understand something, the freer, more active, and empowered we become. Now, despite his much-celebrated adoption of a “panpsychic” view of the world, Spinoza did not entirely challenge humans’ superiority over other animals.<sup>21</sup> For Spinoza, mental experiences unfold on a hierarchical scale and since humans are said to have more complex minds and bodies than others

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ment of God as the active sustainer of the cosmos. Although such developments struck a blow to biblical formulations of human dominion over creation, they did not entirely challenge notions of humans’ superiority over other animals or anthropocentric resourcism, but instead ushered in justifications of them in new and non-religious terms.

<sup>19</sup> EIIIpref refers to *Ethica* (*Ethics*), Book III, Preface. Further references to the *Ethics* (E) will employ the following system of abbreviations: part number in roman numerals, followed by proposition (p), demonstration (d), scholium (s), corollary (c), postulate (post), definition (dem), and appendix (app). Quotations are from Curley’s and Shirley’s translations, with occasional modifications (Spinoza 1988, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Failing to understand the psychological mechanism behind one’s attraction to another person, which could breed infatuation and obsessive love, is one obvious example of how an inadequate understanding of a situation breeds passions. Although an attraction that is not fully understood might still have various enabling and joyful effects, for Spinoza it would still prohibit one from thinking and doing a wider variety of things, because of the mind’s fixation on a specific external source; not to mention that having one’s happiness depend on another’s affection always carries the risk of having that joy quickly turn into a sad passion (EIVp43s, EIVapp.XIX).

<sup>21</sup> The possibility that one could both promote panpsychism and still leave room for human superiority sometimes escapes the attention of critical animal studies scholars, as can be seen in Steven Shaviro’s celebration of panpsychism as “a kind of countertendency to the anthropocentrism” (Shaviro 2015: 20).



(EIIp13post1),<sup>22</sup> it becomes easier for humans to attain true understanding and “freedom.”<sup>23</sup> This very progression toward greater states of understanding and empowerment does not bring with it an elimination of affects, but the replacement of (joyful or sad) passions with an active and empowering joy.<sup>24</sup>

When we look at the favorable circumstances that could give rise to the joyful occasion of being more active and more powerful (which is tied to having adequate understanding), we see that Spinoza often advises coming together with other fellow humans, because they are able to affect and be affected by each other in a wide variety of ways, which is what it means to be more powerful, and to be more active and so on (EIVp18s, EIVp35c1&s, EIVp37s1). Considering these, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that Spinoza laments Adam’s bonding with the beast and not with his human companion.

As should be obvious, it is difficult to grade the powers and joys of different beings in the *Zhuangzi*, especially when they are all simply doing what they are good at (be it wandering on a bridge above the Hao river or swimming in the water). It is not that things are all “equal” in the *Zhuangzi*, if by “equal” we understand things’ “sameness.” However, they are equal in the sense that they are difficult to rank. This applies to their affects as well. The prevailing theory of affects in the *Zhuangzi* is concerned with whether affects seep into one’s heart (*xin* 心) and settle there (in the same way the judgments that accompany them do).<sup>25</sup> This is also to say that affects are not divided and ranked among each other in terms of whether they are “active” or “passive,” and the same type of affect can be observed in and communicated among different species (as can be seen in Zhuangzi’s observation that fish seem joyful when they are doing what he is doing: wandering).

<sup>22</sup> Certain propositions in EIV (especially p35–37) also suggest an association between reason and human nature. This point is discussed in detail by Margaret Wilson (Wilson 2002: 342–343).

<sup>23</sup> The transition from inadequate to adequate understanding is facilitated by seeing underlying commonalities among various phenomena (experienced by the body and the mind), including the lawful features of nature. This means, in principle, any being in the universe *can* have an adequate understanding of various phenomena. However, the number of adequate ideas that a simpler being is able to form will be very limited, given that, having a simpler body, it will, in general, have a more limited variety of affections of the body, which translates into a limited variety of adequate and/or inadequate ideas.

<sup>24</sup> Amelie Rorty has an excellent discussion of the process of one’s transition from passive joys and pains to active joys of reason (Rorty 2009).

<sup>25</sup> It is common to portray the *Zhuangzi* as suggesting that we should purge the heart of its affects, when the text often points toward allowing affects to simply come and go. In fact, a passage in the *Zhuangzi* reads: “Happiness and anger, sorrow and joy, plans and regrets, change and fixity, pleasant idleness and initiating a position—[they are like] music coming out of hollows, mushrooms shooting forth from steams. Day and night they alternate before us, but no one knows from where they sprout.” The passage, which is also dramatically agnostic about the origin of affects, suggests that moods and thoughts simply sprout forth without warning (the way mushrooms shoot out of the earth overnight) and, if we let them, they also simply cease without taking hold (Guo 2012, 2: 57). Michael Nylan too notes in relation to this passage that emotions, for the *Zhuangzi*, are fully natural and that to be emotionless is being virtually dead (Nylan 2018: 244). Also see Curie Virág for a detailed analysis of emotions in the *Zhuangzi* (Virág 2017: 133–162).



Certainly, Spinoza's warning against associating too closely with beasts is not simply reducible to his somewhat hierarchical view of the world and his bias toward the intellectual powers of humankind. His anxiety about human-animal bonding also has to do with the fact that he clearly views the human-animal difference as an "us versus them" split. A blatant example of this approach is offered in EIVp37s1, where Spinoza notes:

the requirement to refrain from slaughtering beasts is founded on groundless superstition and womanly compassion.... They [beasts] do not agree with us in nature, and their emotions are different in nature from human emotions.<sup>26</sup>

The passage poses an interpretational difficulty largely because Spinoza's ontology allows him to lay out the difference between (hu)mankind and animals in terms of degrees, not kinds, and this passage does not quite serve as an example of the former kind of differentiation.

Now, in the passage, where with the same gesture he distances the (hu)man from both women and animals, Spinoza seems to be posing the existence of a fundamental difference between the affects of the former group and the latter, and using it to support his point that humans may treat animals as they wish. The same passage continues:

We have the same right over them [beasts] as they do over us. Indeed, since every individual's right is defined by its virtue or power, man's right over beasts is far greater than their rights over man. I do not deny that beasts feel (*bruta sentire*); I am denying that we are on that account debarred from paying heed to our own advantage and from making use of them as we please and dealing with them as best suits us, seeing that they do not agree with us in nature and their emotions are different in nature from human emotions. (Spinoza 2002: EIVp37s1)

The motivation behind the assertion that men should not curtail their actions to protect beasts is not surprising given the overall amoral tone of the text. Indeed, when Spinoza asserts that "we have the same right over them as they do over us," he is simply rejecting the Christian stewardship model which tells us that mankind has a responsibility to take care of other beings and which is obviously imbued with the vision of man as created in the image of God. When Spinoza continues, in the same passage, with "since every individual's right is defined by his virtue or power, man's right over beasts is far greater than their rights over man," he is again keeping with the overall spirit of the text.<sup>27</sup> His explanation that "I do not deny that beasts feel; I am denying that we are on that account debarred from paying heed to our own advantage and from making use of them as we please" also sits well with the rest of the text, where pity is defined as a species of sadness (EIIIp22s) and is said to

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<sup>26</sup> The original reads: "Legem illam de non mactandis brutis, magis vana superstitione, & muliebri misericordia....nobiscum natura non conveniunt, & eorum affectus ab affectibus humanis sunt natura diversi." (Spinoza 1925).

<sup>27</sup> Spinoza equates right with power, which is what enables him to argue that "man's right over beasts is far greater than their rights over man" (Spinoza 2002: EIVp37s1).

decrease one's power.<sup>28</sup> Whether Spinoza also needed to add the phrase "they do not agree with us in nature and their emotions are different in nature from human emotions" to support his point, and whether one could even give a substantial account of this discrepancy in a way that would align it with the rest of the text—that is the question that merits our attention.

What we see in Spinoza's treatment of animal affects (or, more accurately, his treatment of people who identify with such affects) is not simply a desire to maintain a sense of human superiority over nonhuman nature, but rather a concern to maintain human solidarity—which, Spinoza thinks, could be disrupted when humans feel strongly connected to animal life.<sup>29</sup> Spinoza's anxiety about the possibility that human-animal intimacy might take the form of preferring the company of animals over humans makes a clear appearance in passages where Spinoza speaks of "satirists" deriding "the doings of mankind" and "melancholics" who "disdain men and admire beasts" (Spinoza 2002: EIVp35s). That human-animal bonding is presented as a potentially disjunctive experience partly has to do with the fear that caring for animals might curtail "our" own powers. Hence, the rigidity of Spinoza's conception of "us" also has to do with the power that such borders have afforded those who are deemed "human." Although Spinoza's investment in human bonding draws support from his view that there are different grades of complexity among various organisms (which enable them to stimulate and empower each other differently), that he presents the distinction in an us-versus-them framework has to do with his awareness of the obvious fact that human flourishing is often accomplished at the expense of animal suffering.

Given the way that the human-animal opposition is also often tied up with raced, gendered, and classed distinctions in the Greco-European philosophical tradition (and beyond),<sup>30</sup> a few words must be said about the rhetorical work that the imagery of the beast does in Spinoza's political philosophy. It is obvious that Spinoza associates animality with disorder, violence, and anti-social affects, considering that the rare examples of animal life he gives consist of warring bees, jealous doves, and big fish eating small fish.<sup>31</sup> Given that increased sociality is the natural outcome of improved mental powers (EIVp18s, EIVp73d), it is no wonder Spinoza often resorts to animality tropes when describing examples of bad politics. Spinoza explicitly describes communities that cause their citizens to fall prey to superstition under the

<sup>28</sup> This is why Spinoza later writes that "a man who lives according to the dictates of reason strives as far as he can not to be touched by pity" (Spinoza 2002: EIVp50c).

<sup>29</sup> I owe this point to Hasana Sharp (Sharp 2011: 55).

<sup>30</sup> For an ambitious attempt to map a wide variety of social distinctions within humans onto the distinction between human and nonhuman animals, see Kari Weil (Weil 2012). Similar arguments, with regard to the way various theories of social difference are tied to the human-nonhuman animal distinction, were made by Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben as well (Derrida 2008; Agamben 2003).

<sup>31</sup> The examples are from *The Letters (Epistolae)* and the *Theologico-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)* (Spinoza 1985: 19, 2007: 16.2). References to *The Letters* denote the letter number; references to the *Theologico-Political Treatise* denote the chapter number and the paragraph.

cloak of religion, which he also notes “extinguishes the light of reason,” as “degrading rational man to beast” (Spinoza 2007: preface). This particular language of deterioration and misdirection is consistently used in Spinoza’s discussion of superstition, which leads people “astray” (Spinoza 1985: 54), renders them “childish” (Spinoza 1985: 21), and, once again, reduces them to beasts.<sup>32</sup> Given Spinoza’s deployment of animality tropes to describe irrational beliefs and behavior, it could be said that the story of the Fall can also be read as an allegory for a bad polity, to describe people succumbing to irrational forces.

For Spinoza, the path for human salvation lies in human solidarity, which is to be cemented through organized efforts to structure human encounters in enabling ways. Despite its many trappings,<sup>33</sup> because of the way humans can enhance each other’s intellectual and affective powers, Spinoza defends human togetherness against the cynicism of misanthropic animal-sympathizers and declares that “it is of the first importance to men to establish close relationships and to bind themselves together with such ties as may most effectively unite them into one body” (EIVapp12). Hence, despite the presence of bad polities that stifle human flourishing, Spinoza states that any society is still better than none, not only because “man is a social animal,” but also because “man is a God to man” (*hominem homini Deum esse*) (Spinoza 1988: EIVp35s).<sup>34</sup> This latter assertion not only counteracts Hobbes’s portrayal of humans as lupine creatures,<sup>35</sup> it also demonstrates that although Spinoza’s system is without a caring God, it is not without redemptive hope.

#### 4 Conclusion: The Cementing and Loosening of Human Bonds in Spinoza and the *Zhuangzi*

Spinoza’s views on the human-animal distinction are still very much understudied, probably because they had less of a historical impact in Europe than the Cartesian beast-machine theory. However, Spinoza’s views most certainly merit careful attention due to their uniqueness in displaying how one could argue for the significance of the human world and human bonding, while also putting humans where they

<sup>32</sup> Spinoza writes: “Away with this destructive superstition, and acknowledge the faculty of reason which God gave you, and cultivate it, unless you would be counted among the beasts” (Spinoza 1985: 76).

<sup>33</sup> Spinoza is not entirely idealistic when it comes to his assessment of human behavior. He in fact states that people are “generally disposed to envy and mutual dislike” (Spinoza 2002: EIVp35s), “for the most part allow lust to govern all their actions” (Spinoza 2002: EIVapp14), and get “carried away by their sensual desire and by their passions” instead of following “the dictate of sound reason” (Spinoza 2007: 5.8).

<sup>34</sup> Both the preferability of living with people over solitude, and the lofty description of people’s relations to each other are asserted in EIVp35s. Also see EIVp73.

<sup>35</sup> Hobbes famously asserts that “a man is a wolf to another man” (Hobbes 1998 [1642], epistle dedicatory). The phrase, of course, originally appears in one of Plautus’s plays (*Asinaria*, 1. 495) in its Latin version “Homo homini lupus.”

belong: in the natural world. His views also show us that having an ontology that bridges the gap separating the thinking human from the mindless animal does not necessarily translate into a philosophy where the “others” of society are immediately embraced. Certain discontinuities between humans and other animals are expressed in Spinoza more than a few times, and especially in moments when he also exhibits a deep concern for maintaining and fostering human companionship. One could argue that this anxiety perhaps does an even better job of ambiguitating the human-animal dichotomy than his own ontology does, since his cautions against animal bonding serve as obvious instances of the phenomenon of “affirmation by negation.” Spinoza is wary of human-animal bonding perhaps because the borders separating the two enjoy enough porosity for bonding to be possible<sup>36</sup>—and the more Spinoza warns against and condemns this porosity, the more he brings to our attention humans’ closeness to other animals. Hence, in a way, the *Ethics* stands out as a perfect resource for reflecting on various anxieties that a drastic blurring of the human-animal binary might raise.

Of course, Spinoza’s investment in building stable and sustainable human communities is rooted in his more fundamental investment in human companionship, which, he asserts, helps humans reach higher levels of understanding and happiness. His penning of two political treatises in order to evaluate different forms of governance is similarly informed by his commitment to human togetherness and by his view that there are simply better and worse ways of living one’s life. That by itself justifies the effort to organize one’s day-to-day encounters so as to enter into enabling alliances, which Spinoza imagines along human-centered lines because of the presence of hierarchically ranked affinities in the world. Moreover, Spinoza tends to project war-like and anti-social characteristics onto animals, which, at times, informs the way he mobilizes direct comparisons between humans and beasts in order to describe the threats awaiting humanity should it lose its direction.

When it comes to the issue of the human-animal binary in the *Zhuangzi*, although it is difficult, if not impossible, to pin down a finalizing interpretation of the stories and dialogues in the text, it is certain that the authors are not motivated by an interest in cementing human society. If one were to entertain a scenario in which Adam was a character in the *Zhuangzi*, we might expect many different (and possibly amusing) outcomes to unfold from this. However, although the *Zhuangzi* is a multivocal text that expresses a range of positions on the topics it discusses, it is difficult to imagine any layer of the text expressing alarm at the sight of Adam bonding with a snake. In fact, the layers of the text that are often labeled “primitivist” present us with wistful portrayals of ancient times during which humans and animals lived together on equal terms.<sup>37</sup> Whether through the rhetoric of going back to simpler times or through more radical gestures of throwing established assumptions into question,

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<sup>36</sup> Sharp (2011, 49).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, the *Mati* 馬蹄 (“Horse Hooves”) chapter, which tells us that in those times people were “clothed by their own weaving, fed by their own plowing” and that “all creatures lived together, merging their territories into one another. The birds and wild animals clustered with each other, the grasses and trees grew unhampered.”

the text exhibits a carefree attitude toward humans' "descension" into a beastly existence (whether literally or metaphorically).<sup>38</sup> This has to do with the fact that the *Zhuangzi* also does not conceive the image of "animal life" in terms of an existence red in tooth and claw, hence it does not use the imagery of animality to help justify ideologies of institutional governmentality.

It is obvious why an approach that complicates the human-animal binary *à la* the *Zhuangzi* would be appealing for critical animality studies, whether we are talking about the animal in its own right or about what animality figuratively stands for. Argumentative gestures that blur the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman have long been celebrated in critical animality studies and in ecological movements that are informed by Continental philosophy (such as queer ecology). If the aim is to purposefully ambiguate the human-animal opposition, which is tied to normative and exclusionary visions of humanity, then a text like the *Zhuangzi* can indeed inspire new insights into how to contest dominant theories of human-animal difference. In fact, one important thing that the *Zhuangzi* persistently invites us to examine is the trappings of being at the center of the order of things and having "the power to include." Through the tragic stories of creatures like Hundun and the bird that is killed at the hands of a well-intentioned nobleman, the text offers us a glimpse into how gestures of inclusiveness coming from those who represent the norm can easily turn into gestures that efface the other—whether the other stands for the literal animal or those who are deemed animal-like.<sup>39</sup>

If, however, one wants to carry these insights in a direction that issues liberating solutions to conflicts surrounding humans' treatment of nonhuman animals, then what the *Zhuangzi* offers is simply the gift of self-doubt, not pragmatic guideposts. After all, the *Zhuangzi*'s all-inclusive and multivocal approach comes at the price of not only decentering the human through radical heteronomy and other-directedness, but also giving up claims to authority as a text. This, by itself, makes it difficult to use the *Zhuangzi* in an agenda-laden way. Hence, although the *Zhuangzi* opens up a capacious space of inquiry, it does not provide clear standards for how to measure progress in the quality of human or animal lives.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Compare this attitude with that of *Mengzi* 3A4, which presents one of the most elaborate narratives of the emergence of people from a wretched beastly existence thanks to the clarification of the five relations (the kinship between fathers and sons, the proper conduct between the sovereigns and ministers, the distinction between husband and wife, the sequencing of the old and the young, and fidelity between two friends). Citations to *Mengzi* give section numbers in *A Concordance to the Mengzi* (Lau et al. 1995).

<sup>39</sup> That Hundun also connotes animal and subhuman imagery is demonstrated by Norman Girardot. As Girardot notes, in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 Hundun explicitly features as one of the four mythical fiends (*si xiong* 四凶) who are cast out by Shun into the four distant regions (where alien peoples—who are sometimes associated with uncouth, if not barbaric behavior—were thought to live). Later variations of Hundun mythology include a reference to it as a divine dog with dysfunctional orifices (that is, unseeing eyes, unhearing ears, and a non-defecating rectum), who associates with non-virtuous people (Girardot 1983: 129, 188). It must be noted that *Zuo Zhuan* uses Hùndūn 渾敦 for Hùndūn 混沌. The meanings of the characters 渾 and 混 are almost identical and the variation in the second character may be due to the fact that it lacked a pre-Han seal script.

<sup>40</sup> The wording is borrowed from Weil (Weil 2012: 24).

Without drawing universal and definitive correlations between specific onto-epistemological and political attitudes, one could still safely assert that the *Zhuangzi*'s overall undermining of pan-contextual knowledge claims about any aspect of life is intertwined with its egalitarian attitude toward underrepresented and undervalued vantage points in the world. However, the same epistemic attitude also results in the absence of regulatory and purposive political engagement. In fact, given the common metaphor of sensory organs as officials (*guan* 官), the story of Hundun also intimates a critical commentary on body-politic metaphors, according to which the organs carved into Hundun's face parallel bureaucratic structures in society. In this way, the *Zhuangzi*'s critique of commitments to building a "human" realm defined in exclusionary terms goes hand in hand with its undermining of theoretical apparatuses of right and wrong, and better and worse, as well as its condemnation of deliberate control and direction. Thus, the big question to ponder is whether one can be actively engaged in institutional political praxis like Spinoza, and yet, like Zhuangzians, also avoid ranking some ways and forms of living as indubitably better than others.

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# Chapter 32

## Zhuangzi and Nietzsche



Geling Shang

### 1 Introduction

There is no actual relationship at all between *Zhuangzi* (about 369–286 B.C.E) and Nietzsche (1844–1900) in terms of influence that the latter might have had upon the former. Zhuangzi lived about twenty-five hundred years earlier than Nietzsche, somewhere around the Yangzi River on the other side of the earth, thousands miles apart from Röcken in Germany, where Nietzsche grew up. A comparison of their philosophies therefore may seem idiosyncratic, to say the least. What struck me the most, however, in reading the works of these two great and lonely hearts is that their aspirations seemed to run unexpectedly into one another beyond time and space, whispering their words to one another with an eccentric language so alien to ordinary ears. They are indeed historically and culturally different, and yet are uncannily complementary.

Though Nietzsche had some acquaintance with Indian Buddhism and Hindu culture, he knew precious little about China.<sup>1</sup> He certainly had read enough to prompt his disparagement of the former. Nietzsche believed Buddhism to be the highest mode of nihilism and pessimism (WP: 55, 154, A: 20).<sup>2</sup> He also very briefly mentioned the

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<sup>1</sup>Nietzsche's acquaintance with Hinduism and Buddhism perhaps came from his study of Schopenhauer and from his longtime friend Paul Deussen, who became the leading authority of Upanishadic philosophy in Germany. See Carl Pletsch 1991, 79–93 and Freny Mistry 1981, 12–18, and especially Mervyn Sprung, “Nietzsche's Trans-European Eye” (Parks 1991, 76–90).

<sup>2</sup>The abbreviations of Nietzsche's works used in this paper follow: *The Antichrist*, abbr. A, *Beyond Good and Evil*, abbr. BGE, *The Birth of Tragedy*, abbr. BT, *Ecce Homo*, abbr. EH, *The Gay Science*,

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Chinese tradition as an Oriental example of the overall decadence of the human race (A: 32, WP: 129), without any awareness of the fact that there was also a “fortunate accident” and “exception” in the history of Chinese thought, just as there were in Greek antiquity (Anaximander, Heraclitus, Empedocles etc.). Perhaps Nietzsche would have agreed with this had he, by “accident”, read Zhuangzi, or texts from Chinese Buddhist schools such as Tiantai, Huayan or Chan. In any case, whatever small acquaintance Nietzsche had with Chinese culture, Zhuangzi had no idea at all of the West (specifically Europe). His thought fermented and developed out of his own life experience and the cultural environment of Warring States China. With such a vast separation in time, space and cultural context, is it possible to bring Zhuangzi and Nietzsche together and come up with a comparison between their texts?

Some have already noted the philosophical affinity between the two. Joan Stambaugh, in her article “The Other Nietzsche,” suggests that Eastern mystical experiences, such as Chan experiences, may have been the hidden or “other Nietzsche” we have largely neglected in the scholarly literature -- the mystic poet and “the poetic mystic”. At the end of the article she surprisingly remarks:

Temperamentally, Nietzsche was perhaps closest to Laozi and Zhuangzi with his rejection of the metaphysical background and his understanding of the world as play. (Parks 1991: 30)

Other than J. Stambaugh, scholars who have done some partial comparisons include Chen Gu-ying (Parks 1991, 115–129), Graham Parkes (Parkes 2013, 1–12), Roger Ames (Parkes 1991, 130–150), and a few others.

In this chapter I intend to undertake a sustained analysis of less obvious affinities and differences between Zhuangzi and Nietzsche. I will do this by an interplay or cross-reading of their texts on various basic philosophical presuppositions and issues, such as truth, knowledge, language, morality, nature and human life. In contrast with many conventional commentaries, I tend to interpret their writings from an *interlogical* perspective. I take this approach because I find the central terms they employed to express their ideas do not designate or refer to any substance but interality.<sup>3</sup> Zhuangzi’s “Dao” and “*tong* 通 or throughness,” for example, “*ziran* 自然, or thus-so-ness,” Nietzsche’s “will to Power,” “self-overcoming,” “flux of life” and so forth, represent no substance but relations, processes, forces, emptiness, nothingness etc., or *jian* 間 (interality) in general. Because they are grounded in the perspective of interality, I argue, that both thinkers created their unique styles of philosophy, which culminated in their kindred spirits of life affirmation.

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abbr. GS, *Human, all too Human*, abbr. HAH, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, abbr. GM, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, abbr. TL, *The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge*, abbr. P, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, abbr. Z, *Twilight of the Idols*, abbr. TI, *Untimely Meditations*, abbr. UM, *The Will to Power*, abbr. WP.

<sup>3</sup>“Interality” is the word I coined to render the Chinese character *jian* 間 and *jianxing* 間性 and by extension “interalogy” *jianxinglun* 間性論 is the study of interality. Interality designates a plane or domain of reality that encompasses change, transformation, process, space/time, interval, passage, relation, connection, communication, interaction, throughness, organism, network, unity/unification, and those that are other-than-being or non-being. In the history of western philosophy, all the above mentioned phenomena have been either subordinated to the concept of Being or Substance or excluded from the ontological scheme entirely. On the contrary, *jian* has been the central focus and fundamental problematic in the Chinese tradition. (See Shang 2015, 2016).

## 2 The World of Becoming and Appearance

The fundamental presupposition both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche held is that the reality of the world is a process of change or flux of becoming (*shengsheng* 生生, *chenghui* 成毀). Both disagree with the various metaphysical beliefs in a universal and intelligible being or substance that is not subject to any change. There is no essence or self-nature behind appearances; what is real is what it appears to be. From this starting point, Nietzsche made himself an anti-metaphysician. Zhuangzi, on the other hand could be called a “trans-metaphysician,” if he were somehow classified according to the framework of Platonic metaphysics. Nietzsche’s and Zhuangzi’s combined critique of conventional values and popular cultures are grounded on this fundamental recognition and affirmation of becoming and appearance.

Although most early Chinese thinkers share the notion that the world is constantly moving and changing, many of them still attempt to fix meanings of terms in ways that will stabilize social orders, and because of this, for Zhuangzi, they become fixed-heart/minded (*chengxin* 成心). Zhuangzi denies any kind of fixation and experiments with a state of heart-mind in complete concurrence with the flux of the ever changing life-world. In chapter two of the *Zhuangzi*, he used expressions such as “*fangshengfangsi* 方生方死, the moment of birth is the moment of death,” and “*chengzhehuiye* 成者毀也, the completion [of becoming] is annihilation,” (2/3, Watson 1968: 41<sup>4</sup>) to depict the constant changing nature of the world. Given that the world as a whole is an ever-changing process of becoming, everything that has become what it is must have come from no-thing (*wu*) and must go back to no-thing. No-thing itself as no-itself must be no-thing (*wuwu*), but a perpetual flow of becoming or transformation (*hua*), with no beginning and end, no-thing and no-thought can be fixed as a “true master” (*zhenzai* 真宰) or the “Being of all beings.” In other words, no-thing is neither nothing nor anything, or both nothing and everything (*wuwu*), a set of negations that depict the paradoxical movement of becoming.

There is a tension between the natural world and human consciousness. The former simply flows in a care-free, non-teleological manner, letting all things and events appear and vanish, conjoint into and disperse from one another, like the music of heaven (*tianlai*). Consciousness, however is a state of heart-mind that could be severely affected by the human condition - culturally and psychologically. Inasmuch as human consciousness is constituted by both nature (*tian*) and human beings (*ren*), the tension or struggle between them becomes an essential part of the human world. The instant response of consciousness is usually to resist the natural propensity of change. The creation of civilization itself could be the product of this tension. The entire history of the human world is to a great degree driven by this tension. When humans attempt to impose their own fixed orders onto nature (*ziran*) and make the world “human, all too human,” their excessive desires and

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<sup>4</sup>The numeration of the chapters/sections (2/3, for example) follows Gu-ying Chen (1983), mostly based on Guo Xiang’s commentary. I have made revisions primarily from Watson’s translation (Watson 1968), and I put “Watson 1968: page number” after those revised translations.

attachments to things and ideas result in fixations of heart-mind that often lead to competitions, disputes, and wars. By the same token, if humans do not act upon the natural world at all, they would either become wild as beasts or lose their own creative and conscious natures. The key to overcoming the fixation of heart-mind and liberating oneself to a free and easy style of life (*xiaoyaoyou*) is to reach a balance or thoroughness between nature and human being in a harmonious unity. This is the state that Zhuangzi called “thoroughness as one” or *tongyi* 通一 (2/3, Watson 1968: 41).

Nietzsche, on the other side of the world, holds fundamentally the same position. He is opposed to the Platonic metaphysics of the timeless and unchanging Form or Being. For Nietzsche, the greatest problem of Platonism is its rejection of change and becoming as the true face of reality and its perpetuation of the Form as the ideal models (origin) of all sensible existents. This has become, since Plato, the foundation of mainstream Western metaphysics, on which all the prevailing values are based. The project of Nietzsche is to “revalue all values” or “philosophize with a hammer” (TI). This is initiated by destroying the illusion of Being (or substance, god, truth) that has been juxtaposed to change, and has morphed into a deep “denial of life” or nihilism, which is deemed by Nietzsche as the pathological sign of the West’s cultural degeneration.

The basis upon which the Platonic tradition has rested are the metaphysical assumption of dualistically opposing values: Truth vs. untruth; Being vs. becoming; Reality vs. appearance; Good vs. evil; Reason vs. instinct; Soul vs. body; etc. Within this binary system every term denoted here with the upper case is valued while the opposite is devalued as unreal or a negative factor of life. But in fact, as Nietzsche realizes, everything this tradition de-values and resents belongs to the real world of life, and those it normally values the highest “must have another, peculiar origin—they cannot be derived from this transitory, seductive, deceptive, paltry world, from this turmoil of delusion and lust. Rather from the lap of Being, the intransitory, the hidden god, the ‘thing-in-itself’” (BGE: 10). This fundamental faith in opposite values, demonstrated in Western metaphysics and Christian morality, rejects and denies the actual world for another, fictional one. “In summa: ...this world, in which we live, is an error—this world of ours ought not to exist” (WP: 585/A). To what type of life does this kind of evaluation lead? According to Nietzsche, the type of life that emerges from such values is the type of declining, weakened, weary, and condemned life: the life of degeneration and decadence. Furthermore, “what kind of man reflects in this way? An unproductive, suffering kind, a kind weary of life” (ibid.). Such a weary or weak kind really needs the “metaphysical comfort” that would provide some *other* world which is more real than this one so that the hope or dream will come true once one leaves this life in this actual world of becoming.

The world is appearance (*Schein*) or mere appearance. For Nietzsche, appearance is no longer something degraded, distorted, erroneous and thus opposed to a higher Being. Nor is it a mere attempt to demonstrate that Being is Becoming that merely inverts Platonic metaphysics, for any metaphysical distinction between a true and an illusory (apparent) world of becoming is only a symptom of the decline of life (TI, IV). And again, “The true world—we have abolished. What world has

remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one” (TI, V). So it is important to acknowledge that the term “appearance” here is devoid of a contrary, an opposite and is something beyond the Platonic duality.

Zhuangzi would go along with Nietzsche delightfully wandering around the world of appearance. What appears to us is what is real. “A perfect person uses her heart-mind like a mirror, which never imposes nor favors but merely responds to whatever appears without any reservation” (7/6, Watson: 97). The attempt to contemplate and conceptualize what hides behind or underneath the appearance as thing-in-itself often creates distortions, hindrances, fixations and resentments of the actual face of our life-world.

### 3 Interality: Thoroughness and Will to Power

If becoming is not being, what is it then? If the world is not one of being/form, what appears in the appearance, other than being? In order to answer such questions, we ought to first come to the realization that the world is composed at least of two parts or phenomena: one is what we call beings or things, which are either intelligible or sensible objects. The other part includes the existing phenomena other-than-beings, which are neither intelligible nor sensible in respect of an ontological mode of thinking. The former includes all substantial entities such as matter, things, atom, persons and their representational ideas/concepts. The latter includes none of the substantial factors of reality such as change, becoming, space-time, relation, process, organism, environment, etc., which are the causes that effect the change and becoming of things. While the thinking of being/substance has constituted the ontology on which Western metaphysics is based, the phenomena of interality, *jian* or *jianxing* (間性), on the other hand, have become the central or focal attraction of Chinese philosophy. In contrast to western ontology, as I pointed out elsewhere, Chinese philosophy is grounded on the study of interality, namely, interalogy (Shang 2015, 2016).

My understanding and interpretation of Zhuangzi’s philosophy (in the *Zhuangzi*, especially the Inner Chapters), has revolved around one specific Chinese character *tong* 通, or “thoroughness” that I have reluctantly coined because I could hardly find an equivalent in English.<sup>5</sup> For Zhuangzi, the ultimate *dao* is the thoroughness that threads all things that come into being and subsist together harmoniously, as One, in the endless process of transformation. “*Dao* *throughs* as One” (*daotongweiyi*, 2/3, Watson 1968: 41), is thus the central idea or guiding principle of Zhuangzi’s philosophy. Similar to most Chinese thinkers at the time, Zhuangzi too sought the ideal state of oneness between nature and human (*tianrenheyi*). Nevertheless, his

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<sup>5</sup>Thoroughness was first used in my *Liberation as Affirmation: The Religiosity of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche* (Shang 2006). I have further explored its philosophical significances in *Zhuangzi – Dancing with the World* (Shang 2010).

idea of oneness is not to identify all into one entity or concept of being, be it a substance, deity, or moral principle, but *throughness*, which flows *through* in the midst, or *interality*, of heaven and human, person and person, community and individual so that there won't be any major conflict but a harmonious relationship among them. The interalogical function of throughness creates an ideal state of oneness, within which everyone and everything would enjoy being one with each other without losing or alienating their own difference, like the metaphor of piping or music of Heaven (*tianlai*).

Throughness is what Zhuangzi meant by "*dao*," "harmony" and "one." And the ideal or free style of life (*xiaoyaoyou*) Zhuangzi pictures is actually the manifestation of the state of throughness. *Dao* or *Way* is throughness, and throughness results in the harmony and oneness of the ten-thousand-things. Imagine if we are lost in a mountain, what we are looking for is the *way* out. What we are looking for is not a way, as a thing, but an opening or throughness that can lead us out. Or, if we fell into a dark cave, the first thing for us to do is to seek a way back to the open ground. Again, the way we are seeking is a sort of passage or gate that we can go through. Doors or windows of a house are not doors or windows as things-themselves but openings. This is why Zhuangzi said that *Dao* "throughs" or *Dao* is "throughness," not as a thing or some transcendental being. *Dao* is what opens through for all things to come into existence and pass into annihilation. *Dao*, therefore, is throughness or openness, expressed by *xu*/emptiness, *wu*/nothingness, *qi*/breath/energy *between* or *amongst* things, ideas and beings. *Dao* is thus conceived of as the best condition or ideal state of interality which brings about life, motion, change/becoming, relation, aggregation and harmony of all things/beings. This is the meaning of "*Dao* throughs (or opens through) as one." It simply "throughs" and thus provides or creates room, opening, or the ideal state of interality (*daoshu* 道樞, *huanzhong* 環中) for all things in the world of becoming.

In sum, the emphasis on throughness is what distinguishes Zhuangzi's philosophy from Confucius' *dao* of *ren* (benevolence or loving relationship), Laozi's *dao* of *wu* (no-thingness), Mozi's *dao* of *jianai* (universal love) and other schools of thought. It is also from the perspective of throughness that Zhuangzi developed other unique teachings such as free flowing without obstruction (*xiaoyaoyou*, *wudai*), the usefulness of uselessness (*wuyongzhiyong*), equalizing things and opinions (*qi wulun*), losing oneself (*shangwo*), following the natural course (*yinshi*), nurturing life as learned from Cook Ding, heart-mind fasting (*xinzhai*), sitting and forgetting (*zuowang*), the true person (*zhenren*), goblet words (*zhiyan*), the sagehood inside and the competence of ruling outside (*neishengwaiwang*) and many more.

Will to power (*Wille zur Macht*) is a notion Nietzsche created and attempted to use in order to explain or reevaluate "the essence" of our instinctive life: the flux of becoming and the apparent world. What does Nietzsche mean by will to power? Why will to power?

In opposition to the traditional view of the will, which in effect turns it into a metaphysical substance or ultimate cause and source of all that exists, Nietzsche conceives of it as "something complicated, something that is a unity only as a word."

Nietzsche explicitly points out that will is a fundamental element of human life. It is not merely sensations and thinking, but “above all” an *affect* of a command and obedience. “Freedom of the will”—that is the exercising volition who commands and at the same time identifies himself with the executor of the order—who, as such, enjoys also the triumph over obstacles, but thinks within himself that it was really his will itself that overcome them” (BGE: I, 19). This specific will, the *affect* of a command, the sensation and feeling of this “freedom” to discharge its strength, is the one basic form of the will.

Power designates force, not any kind of natural, i.e. physical force, but the force driven by the will towards (*zur*) release or discharge. Note that it is not a force pertaining to a thing or ontological being but a force generated from the relations and other factors of interality that in fact effect and even determine the existence and the existential state of things: “A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting” (GM: I, 13). Thus, to the concept of “force” an inner will must be attributed, and only this kind of force Nietzsche designates as “will to power” (WP: 619). Will to power, the power thus desired, should be understood as the primary force of life, everything that becomes, appears, commands and obeys, grows and declines, is in fact a spectacle of will to power: “A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power”(GM: I, 13). Power cannot be perceived as entity, reality, thing, or even a property of being. Power is a relational factor of interality between or among things and human beings. Only if beings are not merely existing in-themselves and of-themselves but *in-relations* with and toward others, can the will to power come into play as the fundamental force of life as the process of becoming: “[T]he world defined and determined according to its ‘intelligible character’—it would be ‘will to power’ and nothing else.” (BGE: 36)

According to Nietzsche, there are at least two basic kinds of force: active force and reactive force. Each appears or creates a type of life, the ascending life or the decadent life. The distinction of these forces is the very core of Nietzsche’s notion of will to power. Commanding, dominating, conquering, creating, possessing and overcoming are characteristics of active force. The active force seeks the enhancement of life, “enjoys the triumph” *over* obstacles or *through* resistances, imposes and creates forms and rules by exploiting circumstances, transforms the existing order and condition of life into a new height, etc. On the contrary, obedience, adaptation, weakness, negativity and decadence are qualities of reactive force. People who exercise such force are an inferior and dominated people who direct their will to power toward another direction—resisting creativity, individuality, transgression in order to save or preserve their lives. Being violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, they are uncertain of and feel contempt for themselves. The struggle and interaction between these two forces are above all the dynamic sources of life and the world of appearance and becoming.

The “intelligible character” of will to power therefore interprets and reinterprets under different circumstances, forms and transforms patterns and perspectives of life in the world. The pattern one chooses to live often relates to the way she chooses to interpret life as such. What determines our interpretation then? Will to power,



Nietzsche replies, and “nothing else.” The will to power is at the same time the action of interpretation through which we impose our perspective and project forms upon things and different species we are encountering, *interalogically*. In other words, will to power cannot make sense unless things and individuals are *placed* or *situated* into processes, relations, interactions, etc.; there would not be *will*, nor *power*, let alone the “*to*,” outside the plane of interality.

More interestingly, what Nietzsche said about will to power displayed an enormous effort to twist free from the metaphysical tradition by looking at the world apart from an ontological perspective. The terms he used above to describe will to power, such as “relation,” “unity,” “process,” “organic function,” “metabolism,” “force,” “affect,” and so forth, are all attributes or elements of interality. Could this be the evidence to conceive Nietzsche’s notion of will to power as a thought experiment that opens up a possible realm of interality as an alternative path of inquiry or interpretation? Through a close reading of both thinkers, my answer is “yes.” Both will to power and thoroughness (*dao*) cannot be understood and developed ontologically. Only from the perspective and on the *ground* of interality can we comprehend fully the innovative profundity of their works.

#### 4 Beyond Skepticism and Relativism: Nature as Primal Unity and Dao Throughing as One

Neither Zhuangzi nor Nietzsche admits any transcendent “Lord” nor Being behind, above, or *prior* to the apparent world in which we are living. Zhuangzi stated that we should not even ask what that “Lord” or “Dao” was, if we were never able to *know* whether it exists or not (2/3, Watson 1968: 38). Nietzsche accuses metaphysics of negating this world in favor of fictitious or imaginary ones. It is true that both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche have no intention of constructing a new system of metaphysics by way of their critiques.<sup>6</sup> But it is also true that they have no intention of denying this world as a natural unity, though they reject metaphysics.

Two kinds of popular interpretations of the worldviews of Nietzsche and Zhuangzi are still prevalent. One construes each as a metaphysician because they do talk about the world as a whole; the other counts each as a relativist, skeptic and even nihilist because of their objection to metaphysics. Although there is some evidence to support both interpretations, their conclusions come at the price of missing something essential. The major contribution the two great thinkers made is that each has created a new way, or as we now like to call it “strategy,” “paradigm” and “discourse” of philosophizing which apparently paralyses or de-values customary

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<sup>6</sup>Applying the word “metaphysician” to both thinkers may seem mistaken, for there is no metaphysics as such (after-physics) in classic Chinese philosophy. However, the tendency to seek and fixate on an absolute or transcendental “true lord” of all things or Being of beings is similar. I have used the word, firstly, for convenience, and secondly, in a broader sense that was criticized by both thinkers, though from different cultural and historical context.

conceptions by shifting their attention to the plane of interality. They are “anti-metaphysicians” in the sense that they reject the fixation, which subjectively divides or differentiates the world into a dualistic, either/or system, and then absolutizes one abstraction out of it as “this,” “right” or Being. And they are “skeptics” and “relativists” only in the sense that they try to undermine such traditional beliefs in the dichotomy of rights/wrongs (*shilfei*). Nevertheless, they seem to know that being skeptical or anti-metaphysical could still be metaphysical if one struggles within the old schemes to discern whether the truth of an *ideal* world could be reached ultimately. More importantly, both shifted their focuses from a discourse on things (*wulun*) or being/substance to that of interality thereby making metaphysical concepts and ontological arguments irrelevant. From the interalogical perspective, labels such as relativists, skeptics, mystics, nihilists etc. are by no means applicable to both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche.

In the *Zhuangzi*, Huishi is depicted as Zhuangzi’s best friend. Huishi was one of the most prestigious sophists of the time. Every conversation ended with Huishi being mocked, ridiculed and educated by Zhuangzi. At the end of the *Zhuangzi*, Huishi is memorialized as follows:

...Huishi tried to introduce a more magnanimous view of the world and to enlighten the sophists. The sophists of the world were happily delighted by his arguments, such as “an egg has feathers”; “a chicken has three legs”... “eyes do not see”...“T square is not right-angled”; “compass cannot make circle”...“the shadow of a flying bird never moves”...“white dog is black”...Cut away half of a pole one foot long everyday, and at the end of ten thousand generations there will still be some left. Sophists who join Huishi arguing like this will have no result till the end of their days...What a pity—that Huishi abused and dissipated his talents without achieving any virtuosity (*de*), chasing after ten-thousand things without returning to [the root]. What he did is trying to exhaust sound by speaking loud or to race against his shadow. How sad! (33/8, Watson 1968: 374–377)

Zhuangzi insists that there is no way to reach anywhere by merely being skeptical and making endless arguments based on language, logic and knowledge. A person of Dao or thoroughness (*zhenren*) should cross over or clean up all these relative opinions and arguments in order to see, to touch, and to live the genuineness of nature.

In his *Gay Science* and *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, Nietzsche too speaks of skepticism:

When a philosopher suggests these days that he is not a skeptic...everybody is annoyed...It is as if at his rejection of skepticism they heard some evil...For skepticism is the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition that in ordinary language is called nervous exhaustion and sickliness; it always develops when races or classes that have long been separated are crossed suddenly and decisively. . . . But what becomes sickest and degenerates most in such hybrids is the *will*: they no longer know independence of decisions and the intrepid sense of pleasure in willing—they doubt the “freedom of the will” even in their dreams. (GS: 208)

But how is *skepticism* possible? It appears to be the truly *ascetic* standpoint of thought. For it does not believe in belief and thereby destroys everything that prospers by means of belief. (TL: 177)

None of these attributions, “metaphysician,” “relativist,” “skeptic” or “nihilist,” can fairly be made of either Zhuangzi or Nietzsche. Both not only denounce skepticism, but they each are still using human language and living in the same world as all of us do. It is always wrong to jump to conclusions too soon without carefully examining the nuances and tricks of the words they actually use. They are something else. They have tried to draw different pictures of the world from those we are used to seeing.

The affinity of the pictures of the world that Zhuangzi and Nietzsche share is not, after all, so hard to locate. They both confirm that this world, the world of our everyday life, is the only *real* world; the nature of this world lies not in its metaphysical or religious underpinning but what it *appears* to be and becomes as it is (*ziran*, self-so or thus-so). Dao is no-thing (*wu*) and hence everything (*wu-wu*, *wudao*) that exists and dies, appears and disappears everywhere, all by itself. Anything *prior* or foundational that we have so far conceived is either illusory or suspicious; it could do no more than conceal the real nature of the world. Nietzsche was worried that the term “appearance” could suggest “Reality” or “Form” *prior* to his “apparent world.” I think he might have been very happy to see how Zhuangzi’s term “*ziran*” could work more adequately than “appearance.”

Zhuangzi and Nietzsche both see the world as a flux of changing and becoming and therefore as chaotic, accidental and unable to be fixed by any language, doctrine or laws. For Zhuangzi, *ziran* never stops changing and transforming itself (*zihua* 自化)—from nothingness to existence, from birth to death, from construction to destruction, from darkness to light and from void to fullness. Nowhere and nothing can be designated or hypostatized as the final root or Lord or creator of the world. In Chapter 17, *Autumn Floods*, North Sea Ruo tells the Lord of the River:

...Ten-thousand-things are equal, [you cannot judge] which is short which is long. Dao has no beginning and end, things live and die, there is no completion that can be gotten hold of; now empty now full, and there is no form that can be occupied. The years cannot be restored, time cannot be stopped; decay, growth, fullness and emptiness, now end now begin. Thus I talk about the “trace” of Dao and the “necessity” of ten-thousand-things. Everything is becoming, either violently or at ease they alter by every movement and shift in every moment. Does it matter that one should or shouldn’t do anything about this? Everything has its intrinsic tendency of self-transformation (*zihua*)! (27/1, Watson 1968: 182)

Within the flow or thoroughness of *zihua* or self-transformation, everything will fulfill its destiny as good with no extra effort, help and “will to power” required: “do nothing and everything will be done,” as Laozi puts it (Chapter 38, Zhu 1984: 150). *Ziran* as such seems to be rather more chaotic than systematic and unitary; any effort to “correct” it will cause the “death” of *ziran*, like what happened to the Emperor of the Center, Chaos (Hundun) in Zhuangzi’s parable: “Every day they bored another hole, and the seventh day Hundun died.” (7/6, Watson 1968: 97)

Nietzsche paints a very similar picture of the world when he insists that everything is becoming, which indicates the primacy of change, transformation and metamorphosis. Nietzsche would likely emphasize something more in addition to Zhuangzi’s notion of spontaneity or *ziran*—the notion of will to power, the active

force of will to power. *Wuwei* would very likely sound too passive or reactive to him, because what he is calling for is not the recognition of transformation in nature but creative, noble and aggressive transformation of the self. This might be seen as another major difference between the two: Zhuangzi's *wuwei* of *ziran* seems more conservative and adaptive than Nietzsche's *ziran* of will to power, which commands, imposes, transgresses, appropriates and overcomes. Nevertheless, Zhuangzi's *wuwei* of *ziran* could be conceived of as just as radical as Nietzsche's will to power. First of all, *ziran* as self-so and self-transformation affirms the changing nature of things, which is the precondition of the will to power. Everything "things," i.e., becomes or creates (*ran*, 然) what it is; it is not fashioned or caused by any pre-determined Being or True Lord, but emerges because of its *thoroughness* (*shun* 順, *shi* 適, *yinshi* 因是, *he* 和) amidst the relations or networks of the world. Secondly, Zhuangzi sometimes uses the word "*sheng*" to connote "transformation" (*hua*). It literally means to produce, give birth to and grow, and can also be extended to creation and creativity. Zhuangzi, as well as Laozi, sees the world or Dao as an ever-renewing, ever-productive or creative (*shengsheng* 生生) process, so to do nothing about or against this process is what indeed is meant by *wuwei*. Let our instincts of sensuality, creativity, and the will to power flourish exuberantly as the spontaneous dynamic of our lives and our self-transformation. Thirdly, if self-adaptation (*zishi* 自適) is to adapt oneself to the nature of self-transformation or self-overcoming, then it can be as radical as the concept of appropriation or *Ereignis*. To adapt oneself to *ziran* is to yield completely to the flux of creation (*sheng*) and transformation, or to say "Yes" and affirm life unconditionally. Finally, Zhuangzi does not worship any idol nor does he oppose any fixed principle and regulation; there is only the self-transformation of nature, which in fact creates itself endlessly as a whole.

Speaking of unity or the world as a whole often makes people wonder whether traditional metaphysics is being invoked, especially for those who are overwhelmed by post-modern or deconstructionist criticism. Yet both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche advocate the concept of unity or oneness as an indispensable part of their perspectives of the world.

One or oneness (*yi*) is often used by Zhuangzi to refer to Dao, *ziran*, and the highest perspective of Dao—"From the perspective of Dao everything is seen as One." The world (*tian*) of Dao or *ziran* is One because the ten-thousand-things are becomings (*sheng*) in a constant (*chang*, 常) process of impermanence (*wuchang*, 无常). In the same respect, the ten-thousand-things transform, and this transformation is the totality of oneness; equally drops and the flowing stream; identically particles and permeating air (*qi*, 氣). There is nothing in this oneness that should be privileged or marginalized, for all of its elements are interdependent on each other as inseparable ones of the One. Needless to say, difference itself originates from differences; but we should also be aware that difference becomes difference only amidst relationality. Therefore One is also the relationality which makes everything come to be and become different. From the perspective of relationality (interality) one sees the oneness of all things.

Thereby, the One that Zhuangzi talked about is not a homogeneous unity but a heterogeneous One of differences and multiplicity, which makes things equal by connecting them (*qi* 齊, *tong* 通) through differences, unifies multiplicity and makes everything display its own becoming. Inasmuch as all things are different, they are equally the same and one; inasmuch as all things are equally same and one, they are able to create and transform differently all by themselves. This is what Zhuangzi called the “chaos,” “harmony” and “throughness” of the world (*tianjun* 天均, *tianni* 天倪, *tiandao* 天道, *daotong* 大通, etc.); this is the music of heaven (*tianlai*) which Zhuangzi enjoyed with a liberated and lucid heart-mind.

The highest perspective is to look at things from the state of Dao or *ziran*, that is, the perspective of One. Ordinary people limit their perspectives to different things as an only One and a close-minded self, so they prefer profit to deficit, fame to disgrace, beauty to ugliness, good to evil, and finally life to death. They only see the differentiation of things but fail to see the constantly changing nature of everything. Thus they always attach themselves to ephemeral things and convince themselves that the things to which they attach are ultimate, just like the fool trying to pick up the foam of a tide without embracing the ocean. They divide the world of *ziran* into different categories and human-all-too-human values. Dao is no longer *through*; it is blocked and stops flowing. The One of differences now becomes “vicious,” exclusive differences; the harmonious chaos now becomes devastating chaos; the world falls into endless war between the privileged and the marginalized, between different groups of interest, and also between different individuals. These consequences could have well been prevented if we had reached Zhuangzi’s perspective of Dao-throughs-as-One from which everything different is equally seen as one and the same:

... Things all must have that which is *so* (*ran*); things all must have that which is *okay* (*ke*). There is nothing that is not *so*; there is nothing that is not *okay*. For this reason you see the differences between a little stalk and great pillar; a leper and the beauty Xi-shi; things ribald or shady and things grotesque or strange. Dao throughs as One. Their dissipation is their completion; their completion is their dissipation. Out of completion and dissipation things intermingle into throughness-as-One. (2/4, Watson 1968: 40–41)

By reaching this spirit of clearing and throughness, one becomes a true or genuine person who “treats what he prefers as one, deals with what is not favorable as one. His oneness is One; his not-oneness is also One” (6/1, Watson 1968: 79–80).

As early as his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche began to interpret the tragic world view, which he always praised and celebrated, as the synthesis of two divine forces: Dionysian and Apollonian, the dark force of destruction and the bright force of individuation. The two were conceived of by pre-Socratic Greeks as the “primitive unity” which contains the difference and contradiction between annihilation and individuation, dream and intoxication, death and life, joy and suffering. This primitive unity of two ever-contradicting and reconciling original forces is the essence of Greek tragedy and the tragic spirit of that time. Later, Nietzsche overcame the still too Hegelian duality of the two deities and established Dionysus alone as the only tragic unity of the world. The primal unity of Dionysus aims no longer to resolve or reconcile the eternal and original contradictions of existence but to affirm them as such, as the nature of the world of becoming and appearance.

In his *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche restated through the voice of Zarathustra the idea he articulated at the outset:

I walk among men as among the fragments of the future—that future which I envisage. And this is all my creating and striving, that I create and carry together into One what is fragment and riddle and dreadful accident. (EH: “Zarathustra,” 8)

The idea of this Dionysian unity is also implied in Nietzsche’s developed principle of the will to power as the movement of life and the world. The will to power is the dynamic force which determines what becomes and appears in the world. Everything becomes what it is and is supposed to be a manifestation of the will to power. On the other hand, will to power is itself different and multiple forces, i.e. active and reactive, creative and preservative. Therefore the will to power is simultaneously one and many, difference and identity, unity and multiplicity. Deleuze has observed:

We should not ask whether, in the final analysis, the will to power is unitary or multiple—this would show a general misunderstanding of Nietzsche’s philosophy. The will to power is plastic, inseparable from each case in which it is determined; just as the eternal return is being, but being which is affirmed of becoming, the will to power is unitary, but unity which is affirmed of multiplicity. The Monism of the will to power is inseparable from a pluralist typology. (Deleuze 1983: 86)

The inseparability of one and many, unity and difference is essential in both Zhuangzi’s and Nietzsche’s vision of the world. And, I would like to argue, it is their emphasis on such inseparability that has distinguished them from both traditional metaphysics and skepticism or relativism. First, they have overcome the dualistic view of the world which is the fundamental presupposition of metaphysics. Second, the oneness or unity in both philosophers is not static Being but difference *per se*. It is the unity of multiplicity, plurality and different types of transformation. Third, the unity is an ever-changing, transforming and impermanent process of becoming that can only fit in an interalogical perspective. Fourth, apart from individual differences there is no unity, hence everything or every different individual is the manifestation of the whole or unity. Every process of becoming, creation and annihilation realizes the whole world of *ziran*, Dao as throughness and will to power. Finally, the world as such is thus affirmed: say *yes* not only to individual things and happenings but to all of them, to life and the world as a whole. Is this metaphysics? Or is it not? Is it skepticism? Or is it not? Is it relativism? Or is it not?

I believe that both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche would laugh at these questions: Does it matter? Could any of these names make the world different or our life worth living? Why can we not forget them for a while to see what is really going on in and outside of ourselves? What we try not to do is create another name, conception or -ism in addition to the many all-too-many of them, but to sweep them from our minds. Let nature be *ziran* that works, appears, becomes, sings, and dissipates, from its own origin of nothingness (*wu*) and no-nothingness (*wuwu*, Dionysus). In this way, the two philosophers may have striking differences with different perspectives and values to some extent, but their ultimate concern with returning to the root or nature of our life is surprisingly similar. By reading their works superficially and sometimes literally, one would easily assert that Zhuangzi and Nietzsche have little in common:

the will to power vs. *wuwei*; creativity vs. *ziran*; becoming vs. *wu* and Dao; difference vs. oneness and identity; chaos vs. harmony; appropriation vs. adaptation; anthropological vs. naturalistic perspectives and so on. Some might see these superficial oppositions as reflective of so called Western and Chinese cultures: dynamic vs. obsolete; creative vs. conservative; aggressive vs. retrospective; commanding vs. obedient; individualist vs. collectivist. Even Nietzsche more than once mentioned Chinese culture as if it were merely an oriental version of decayed Christian culture or European nihilism. He himself has been misunderstood in a different way, and even made use of as a pioneering thinker of Nazism. In the same vein one could argue that these oppositions explain why China lost the Opium War in 1840s and why she fell “backward” in the era of industrialization.

I am suspicious about such comparisons. My study of the two philosophers does not provide much evidence to support such claims. Quite the contrary, if I am right, the superficial and literal contradictions shown in terminologies or words sometimes can connote and convey very similar perspectives, let alone the fact that the two philosophers were great players of language games. We will find that Zhuangzi is as radical and as liberal as Nietzsche and as any other philosopher, if we follow Zhuangzi carefully and look into the depth of what he really suggested by his goblet words, such as *wu-wu* and *wuwei*.

## 5 Transcending the Limit of Language: Goblet Words and Dionysian Dithyramb

Zhuangzi and Nietzsche are explicit in claiming that human language has constructed and determined human ways of thinking and living. They would agree that language is not, as many people have believed, the “proper” representation of the “thing” or “signified.” Nor is it an *adequation* to *nomos*, to the thing-in-itself, or to Being. Words are only signs and metaphors used by human beings to describe and appropriate things and to communicate with each other. Both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche concluded that there is no way to reach reality merely through language, invented by human consciousness and human appropriation.

Antecedent to Zhuangzi, Laozi had already been suspicious of the adequacy of language as capable of representing reality. Dao, thus said Laozi, cannot be “daoed” or “spoken of” (*Laozi*: ch. 1). Dao is the origin of the world as well as of human language, so it is impossible to define this origin in terms of its outcome, just as branches of a tree cannot determine its root. If the whole cosmos is created from the Dao as nothingness or non-being (*wu*), how can we find anything that will correspond to *wu*? If there is no word which can properly correspond to the origin and the nature of the world, why should we rely on words or language to pursue the Dao? We do get help from language to discern things and ideas, but more often we confuse words with reality or attach ourselves to language as if it reveals the absolute



truth to us. Language can in fact be one of the greatest hindrances in apprehending Dao, something that must be subdued and overcome.

As the greatest successor of Laozi, Zhuangzi continues to investigate the problem of language in his more sophisticated and radical way. Words are signs can only signify partial traits of the signified. When we point at an animal and signify it as "horse," we believe without second thought that the name "horse," which Nietzsche would say is a metaphor, is the proper representation of the thing we called "horse" in-itself. Then we begin to identify what a "horse" is with many different definitions, and every definition we give simply puts one more layer, one more sign to the original one. Within the frame of language we cannot get to the point at which the signifier and the signified, or the name and the reality coincide: "horse" is not *horse*, "horse is not" is not *horse* either; "Dao" is not *Dao*, neither is "Dao not Dao." Language could never entirely correspond to the truth or Dao; instead, it could trap us in an infinite game of language and drag us further and further away from the reality. This is exactly what Nietzsche called "the seduction of words" (*BGE*, 20). People often cannot resist such seduction, driven by their desire for appropriation, their "will to power" and their fixed mind (*chengxin*). They have turned the language game into wars for truth, for Dao, for the "ascetic ideal" and for "civilization". Serious disasters result from the serious pursuit of truth, which is indeed an empty word, a humanly fabricated sign or metaphor. Zhuangzi, before Nietzsche, had realized that language is one of the major problems of human beings. Zhuangzi says:

Words are not blowing breath. Words have worded, but what a word worded is never determined. Have words indeed worded? Have words never worded? If words are distinguished from the peeps of baby birds, is there indeed a distinction? Is there no distinction? Whence does Dao withdraw while "true" and "false" come to the fore? Whence is worded hidden while "right" and "wrong" are sounded? Whence can Dao be absent while it goes? Whence can worded be disfavored while it is wording? Dao is always hidden by limited knowledge, worded is always covered by the words of glory and luxury. This is why they are full of "rights" and "wrongs" among Confucians and Moists, they all make their own "wrong" "right" and other's "right" "wrong." There is no way to affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, so better stay illuminated. (2/3, Watson 1968: 39)

The problem with language here is that words fragment and differentiate the unity of nature (Dao). The word is applied and later believed to be the *only* "proper" representation, no longer corresponding to fragment and difference but to the universal truth or the Being of beings. How does this work? How can we ever stop arguing about "right" and "wrong" within the trap of language? "'Right' is an infinity, 'wrong' is an infinity as well" (*ibid.*). Because there is no difference between the two, they are all just words and form only opinions, so why should we cling to them? "Therefore better be illuminated" (*ibid.*). "Be illuminated" or simply "be *through*" (*yiming*, 以明) means to realize the limitation of language, to overcome the fixation of words, letting nature shine by its own light and appearance *through* our heart-mind.

Nietzsche's position on language is similar to Zhuangzi's. He is skeptical that language can represent the true nature of things. Words are signs and metaphors that

we invented to express those things we don't know. "We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word 'I', the word 'do', the word 'suffer':--these are perhaps the horizon of our knowledge, but not 'truths'" (WP: 482). We have to deal with language all the time; it does not mean that we are getting truths, nor that words can represent the "thing-in-itself." We cannot stand the world of appearances and becoming as will to power, so we bury our head in the sand of language to imagine another world of stability, certainty and security. Nietzsche says in *Human all-too-Human*:

The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world. . . A great deal later—only now—it dawns on men that in their belief in language they have propagated a tremendous error. (HAH: "Of first and last things," 11)

Here is the tremendous error of those who have forgotten that "truths" are merely words composed of metaphors, symbols and tropes based essentially upon analogy and dissimulation. Ironically, they have believed that language and its formation (grammar) reflect exactly the nature and structure of the thing-in-itself, from which a fictitious "other world" of abstract meaning and conceptual universality derives. For Nietzsche, if we cannot break through the problem of language, we will never be able to overcome metaphysics and the ascetic will to truth.

The problem Zhuangzi and Nietzsche had to encounter was how to overcome the limitations and fixation of language by using language. It is obviously impossible to accomplish the task by means of the traditional use of language. Thus, Zhuangzi and Nietzsche, two great masters of language, created and played in their texts with unique ways of *speaking* language, their new language which speaks for its own creation and destruction.

The goblet words (*zhiyan* 卮言), the words which can never be filled and which overflow with their ever-multiplying and transfiguring senses, are what Zhuangzi has created and experimented with in his writing. If the world of life appears paradoxical and contradictory, as Nietzsche would put it, the best or appropriate language to "imitate" this world must be paradoxical language, or goblet words. Speaking goblet words manifests the constant flow of the "Heraclitean flux" into which a person steps; it is a language that carries both *is* and *is not* synchronically and paradoxically. Goblet words speak a continuing play of language in which creating and destroying, construction and de-construction, individuation and self-annihilation are not opposites but one "dice throw" of *chongyan* 重言 (dual words).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Chongyan* is often translated as "repeated (*chong*) words," another interpretation is "weighty (*zhong*) words" or "authoritative words." I think these translations are less sufficient than "dual words" in terms of "paradoxical discourse" to display Zhuangzi's deconstructive and creative use of language. "Dual words" do not repeat but negate what has been said immediately, to show opposing or paradoxical senses of language that characterizes Zhuangzi's writing style. The rendi-

The formula of such “dual words” makes the paradoxical statements that “A is A” and “A is non-A” or “non-A is A” at the same time, or asks the double question “Is A A?” and “Is A not A?” or “Is non-A not A?” By playing with goblet words, Zhuangzi meant to show his readers that language is not the truth or law of reality but one of the limited, deceitful and unreliable tools on which humans are doomed to rely on for their life. Nietzsche would have commented at this point that Zhuangzi’s goblet words demonstrate distinctively the impossibility of a logically certain, identical, and absolutely asserted truth presented by language. On the other hand, Zhuangzi suggests that at the bottom of all human argument or dispute, there is ultimately no difference between thesis and antithesis, right and wrong: both *are* and *are not* valid, adequate, or “okay” (*ke*, 可). This does not mean that any claim can be arbitrarily made without regard to its relation to what is “true,” for indeed Zhuangzi himself is trying to tell us something “true” about language, how it functions, and what its limitations are. What it does mean is that every claim as regards the nature of things (*welun* 物論) is subject to the incompleteness and inadequacy of language to provide us with any permanently “right view” given the ever-changing flux of life. This is a view Nietzsche also holds, as he asks: “Why should we squander our lives in arguing words when “life is no argument” (GS: III, 121)? Why do we have to speak a truth (Dao) that cannot be spoken of? Let us speak goblet words, speak language itself, just like the sun rises and sets every day by itself, which says nothing, which says everything (Zhuangzi: 27/2, Watson 1968: 304).

Another aspect of goblet words is *yuyan* 寓言, illustrated in chapter 27 of the *Zhuangzi*, which is allegorical, metaphorical and indirect language most frequently used in the book. Like Nietzsche, the *Zhuangzi* is composed of allegories, aphorisms, anecdotes, dialogues and poems. Instead of formulating discursive and polemic argument, or forming a systematic doctrine or a “metaphysical” edifice, Zhuangzi often tells stories, makes jokes, creates myths and tales, as one of the first fiction writers in Chinese history. Concepts generated from metaphors are still metaphors but are displaced, repressed, forgotten, or simply dead. From their writing style and their use of metaphorical and figurative language, we can ascertain that, for Zhuangzi and Nietzsche, returning to metaphorical language is to revive the vitality and truthfulness of language. In doing this, Zhuangzi and Nietzsche have inaugurated, apart from mainstream philosophy, “a type of philosophy which deliberately uses metaphors, at the risk of being confused with poetry.” Speaking in metaphors makes it possible for language to find its original art of naming and most natural form of expression (Kofman 1993: 17–18).

“Goblet words” may well be rendered as a metaphor of Nietzsche’s way of *speaking* language, especially in the case of Zarathustra’s discourse, which was described by Nietzsche this way: “In every word he contradicts, this most Yes-saying of all spirits; in him all opposites are blended into a new unity”(EH: “Zarathustra,” 6). He called such discourse “Dionysian dithyramb”: “What

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tion “weighty words” catches another meaning of the words, pronounced as *zhong* or heavy, yet it seems implausible to envision that *Zhuangzi* would appeal to authority for help. See Shang 2006: 37–46 for a more detailed argument.

language will such a spirit speak when he speaks to himself? The language of the *dithyramb*. I am the inventor of the dithyramb” (ibid. 7), which originated from the Greek choral hymn for Dionysus. Now language speaks dithyrambically: “Epigrams trembling with passion, eloquence become music, lightning bolts hurled forward into hitherto unfathomed futures. The most powerful capacity for metaphor that has existed so far is poor and mere child’s play compared with this return of language to the nature of imagery” (ibid. 6).

Zhuangzi would use another metaphor for such Dionysian dithyramb or music—*tianlai*, or the music of heaven. Beyond the sounds of man and earth, which are played accordingly by either their determined instrument or their fixed shape, the music of heaven plays without a fixed heart-mind or premeditated “goal.” It simply is “blowing on the ten thousand differences, letting go all by itself spontaneously, making different sounds naturally without obeying any ruler” (2/1, Watson 1968: 37)<sup>8</sup>. Language thus liberates itself from its fixation to designation or the signified (truth), from the battlefield of “rights” and “wrongs,” and becomes *tianlai* or Dionysian dithyramb, from which “we hear nothing but the accents of an exuberant, triumphant life in which all things, whether good or evil, are deified” (BT, 3). A language beyond itself, “the language without words” or “the language that *throughs*” now comes into play and opens up an infinite space for free dancing and wandering *through* the life-world.

## 6 Truth, Knowledge and Interpretation

Humankind has celebrated its gift of rationality and consciousness since Socrates and Confucius, who discovered that human dominance over the physical and animal world lies in its capacity of *knowing* and *reasoning* about the truth or virtue (*de*). By means of learning, reasoning and thinking, one is supposed to possess the knowledge of truth which corresponds exactly to the *reality* of the world (thing-in-itself or the virtue of beings). Pursuing knowledge and acting accordingly are believed to be the most reliable ways to live a true, moral and beautiful life. Both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche reject such belief.

Truth refers traditionally to a knowledge episode that corresponds objectively and properly to reality or the thing-in-itself. Zhuangzi and Nietzsche have made their point clear that truth or human knowledge (*zhi* or *wulun*) are but limited and perspectival, opinions and interpretations which can only carry some temporal and

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<sup>8</sup> *Tianlai* (天籁) is blowing itself while “*renlai* (人籁) is from a single pipe and *dilai* (地籁) multiple holes.” Blowing itself, which could be construed as the movement of interality (throughness), does not have any position and particular sound of its own, so that it can make all different sounds play symphonically. Likewise, real language (*tianlai*) does not have a particular meaning, signified or presence to “obey”; it just speaks, signifies and presents. This is the nature of the language or “the language without words” in the *Zhuangzi*. Unfortunately this aspect has not been fully exposed so far in many commentaries.

provisional meaning or reference. Knowledge is a product of the human-all-too-human aspiration for appropriating things (*zheng* 爭) and persuading others (*bian* 辯), which reflects on our social and moral relationships. What we have done so far in the name of knowledge is to separate our rationality from the whole course of knowing and living, to separate a particular thing—actually an opinion or the name of this thing—from the primordial unity of the world and ironically turn it into the only representation of the whole world. And even worse, after we have formed our knowledge or opinion we forgot it was our invention and estranged ourselves into believers in and slaves of it, prostrating ourselves before what we have created and henceforth waged wars against one another as supposedly original interpreters, creators and legislators. Knowledge, especially the beliefs in metaphysics, theology and even the sciences, is therefore something that confuses and devastates us; it is a symptom of decadent cultures and weary minds.

Zhuangzi provides us with a very vivid description of this:

Big knowledge is broad and idle; small knowledge is detailed and hasty; big words are arrogant and imposing; small words are garrulous and quarrelsome. [With these] man is haunted by spirits while he sleeps, and irritated while he is awake; every time he encounters the external world his mind struggles, perhaps being panicked, perhaps plotting a conspiracy, perhaps hiding some secrets. Small fears are worrisome and sorrow; big fears are agitating and stunned; he sets up devices in order to create rights and wrongs; he insists on his fixed ideas in order to overpower others. Thus he decays like fall and winter day by day. He drowns in what he has done and can never turn back. His mind is getting darker and darker when he becomes older and older. Such a dying mind cannot be recovered. Joy, anger, sorrow, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, dissipation, disguise, insolence, all come out like music from emptiness or mushroom from dampness, replacing each other day and night on the fore. No one knows where they sprout from. Enough! Enough! Having these [troubles] in man's mind morning and evening, this is what his life all about! (2/2, Watson 1968: 37–38)<sup>9</sup>

For Nietzsche, knowledge is what appeals to sick people. “What do they really want? At least to *represent* justice, love, wisdom, superiority—that is the ambition of the ‘lowest’, the sick. And how skillful such an ambition makes them!” (GM: III, 14) “Gradually, the human brain became full of such judgments and convictions, and a ferment, struggle, and lust for power developed in this tangle. Not only utility and delight but every kind of impulse took sides in this fight about ‘truths’” (GS: 110). Underneath the love of knowledge there is “profound *nausea*,” hatred of life and “the will to nothingness”—all that makes one say No to life. “Psychologically,

<sup>9</sup> Some commentators, such as Shi Deqing and Chen Gu-ying, misunderstood the first sentence of this passage. They mistake “*dazhi*” (大知) for “great knowledge” which Zhuangzi would advocate, so they easily interpret “*xianxian*” (閒閒) as profound and comprehensive. Graham follows: “Great knowledge, is free and easy”, which has misled some to think that “Zhuangzi writes as a seeker of great knowledge” (Kjellberg & Ivanhoe, p.30). Watson does the same with some hesitation: “Great understanding is broad and unhurried.” My reading is different, closer to Wang Fu-zhi: *dazhi* and *xiaozhi* (小知) are not opposite knowledge that we should prefer but different forms of knowledge that we should get beyond. And it is also evident in the context of the following sentences that he uses the same style of contrasting big and small, like “big and small words,” “big and small fears,” to show the same problem.

too, science rests on the same foundation as the ascetic ideal: a certain *impoverishment of life* is a presupposition of both of them" (GM: III, 25).

Therefore, all kinds of ideals hitherto, from Confucianism, Moism (or Mohism), Platonism, and Christianity to liberalism, socialism and science, are not *Truths* but only *interpretations* (opinions) emerging from different perspectives that have been differently formed depending on the specifics of situatedness. These opinions become illusions and lies when people universalize, categorize and absolutize their own interpretations in place of the real world of life. This is why arguments over right and wrong, the will to truth and knowledge, the belief in God and metaphysics are called into question by both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche.

The realization that knowledge is temporal, provisional and elusive is the starting point of overcoming the common or traditional notions of knowledge in both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche. There is no knowledge or truth in general but only *one's* interpretation or opinion of things that one has encountered under certain circumstances in one's relation to the other. It is impossible to reach any finality and justification of an exclusive standard or arbiter which will decide what is right. In this respect the knowledge of right and wrong is "infinite"; how could a finite being not but fail in tracing or exhausting the "infinite" (3/1, Watson 1968: 50)? Inasmuch as the transcendental standard or thing-in-itself cannot be found, different opinions or interpretations are *equally* mere opinions or interpretations. This is what Zhuangzi called *Qi Wu-lun*, equalizing opinions and what Nietzsche called perspectivism. As soon as one realizes that knowledge is simply our interpretations or opinions, the gate to overcoming knowledge opens up. And as soon as one enters this gate, one sees also the different approaches of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche.

According to Zhuangzi, there is a kind of genuine knowledge (*zhenzhi* 真知) beyond common and rational opinions, possessed by those enlightened and liberated heart-minds: *zhenren* (真人, genuine person), *zhiren* (至人, culminated person), *shenren* (神人, miraculous person). Three steps are set up by Zhuangzi to attain genuine knowledge. The first step is to *know* the limits and borders of knowledge in order to equalize (*qi*) or "level out" all opinions of rights and wrongs and be free or *through* from endless debating. The second step is to *know* how to *stop* knowing what cannot be known. According to Zhuangzi's "mythical" exposition, our ancestors used to know this perfectly, so that they never were bothered by the hopeless pursuit after knowledge; they never wasted their lives in trying to know something outside their abilities of knowing (2/4, Watson 1968: 41). For knowledge is composed of opinions which separate, isolate and distort things, so that the more we know the more layers of hindrance accumulate and the more distant we are from the nature of things. "To know where to stop knowing what cannot be known, this is perfect knowledge" (2/5, Watson 1968: 44). The third step is to *know not* at all. An illuminated heart-mind or a heart-mind of throughness (*yiming* 以明) empties everything within, reaches the ultimate stage of the genuine knowledge which is the knowledge without knowledge, not even a least opinion that would obstruct or interrupt it from embracing nature and life completely. Only great sages can obtain such knowledge of no-knowledge through Daoist cultivation.



Yen Hui said, "I'm improving!"

Confucius said, "What do you mean by that?"

"I've forgotten rites and music!"

"That's good. But you still haven't got it."

Another day, the two met again and Yen Hui said, "I 'm improving!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I've forgotten goodness and righteousness!"

"That's good. But you still haven't got it."

Another day, the two met again and Yen Hui said, "I'm improving!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I have been sitting-forgetting (*zuowang*)."

Confucius looked startled and said, "What does 'sitting-forgetting' refer to?"

Yen Hui said, "I smash up my limbs and body, drive out intelligence, cast off forms, get rid of knowledge, and make myself identical with the Grand Throughness, This is what I called 'sitting-forgetting'."

Confucius said, "Once you're identical [with nature], you must be free from any prejudice! Once you're transforming [with nature], you must be free from any fixation! What a worthy man you have become now! Even I'd like to be your follower." (6/9, Watson 1968: 90–91)

In addition to this state of sitting-forgetting, the ideas of "heart-mind fasting" (*xinzhai* 心齋, 4/1, Watson 1968: 57), "losing-self" (*sangwo* 喪我, 2/1, Watson 1968: 36), "perfect integrity" (*caiquan*, 才全, 5/4, Watson 1968: 74), "staying-in-the-middle" (*huanzhong* 環中, 2/3, Watson 1968: 40), and "walking both ways" (*liangxing* 兩行, 2/4, Watson 1968: 41) are all meant to express this genuine knowledge of "no-knowledge." Having cast off all biases, one merges herself with Dao, or vice versa, Dao merges itself with one: *dao thoughts as one*. Without intentional strife (*wuwei*) everything will transform and complete itself; without using knowledge (*wuyong*) the utility of things will function perfectly by itself. In other words, to embrace all functions or utilities by not using or utilizing them; this is what Zhuangzi called "being illuminated" and "throughness as One" (*yiming* and *tongweiyi*, 2/4, Watson 1968: 41).

Nietzsche's position on knowledge is somewhat more complex. He would have agreed in many respects with Zhuangzi's idea of overcoming knowledge. For example, when he talks about "the mastery of the knowledge drive" in Greek philosophy, he says: "If we are ever to achieve a culture, unheard-of artistic powers will be needed in order to break the unlimited knowledge drive, in order to produce unity once again. *Philosophy reveals its highest worth when it concentrates the unlimited knowledge drive and subdues it to unity*" (P: 30). He might admire the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers as the great master of the knowledge drive, just like ancient Chinese sages who know when to stop knowing. But in principle, Nietzsche's solution of overcoming knowledge is very different from Zhuangzi's.

"Truths cannot be recognized. Everything which is knowable is illusion" (TL: 187). This assertion by Nietzsche echoes Zhuangzi's claim that every truth is "illusion," "error" or "lie" with no real distinction whatsoever between true and false, right and wrong. But unlike Zhuangzi, Nietzsche has no desire to cultivate disinterest or a pure state of heart-mind to replace illusions. Quite the opposite, since truths are illusions constructed by the herd consciousness and designed for a hostile and



finally destructive relationship to life, we must remove thoroughly the belief in truth as the most delusory mask of human sickness and decadence. While Zhuangzi teaches us to transcend all knowledge and opinions, Nietzsche urges us to reverse the truth *back* to the real world of appearance. His criticism hence focuses on how to recover the forces of original human nature, such as instinct, affect, the body and sexuality, which have been so far negated under the names of truth, knowledge, reason and God. The mere appearances that have been condemned as lie, illusion, error and evil are in fact *truer* than truths.

Nietzsche's ideal substitute for truth and knowledge is art. "How is it that art is only possible as a lie?"

When they are closed, my eyes perceive countless changing images within themselves. Imagination produces these images, and I know that they do not correspond to reality. Thus I believe in them only as images, and not as realities.

Surfaces, forms.

Art includes the delight of awakening belief by means of surfaces. But one is not really deceived! [If one were] then art would cease to be.

Art works through deception—yet one which does not deceive us

What is the source of the pleasure we take in deception which we have already tried, in an illusion which is always recognized as illusion?

Thus art treats *illusion as illusion*; therefore it does not wish to deceive; it *is true*. (TL: 184)

We do not know anything more than surfaces; we cannot penetrate appearances to the core of things-in-themselves, for there is no such core whatsoever. All is interpretation designed for the service of a certain type of life we are living. When we become artists who treat illusion as illusion, lies as lies, we enter the threshold of free interpretation and creation which is Nietzsche's noble way of *true* life. "Our salvation lies not in *knowing*, but in *creating*! Our greatness lies in the highest illusions, in the noblest emotion" (P: 84). For Nietzsche, only cowards are afraid of mistakes and errors; they cannot take life as it is so that they need to *know* the truth on which they can lean.

The value of truth is thus reversed: truths are illusions; illusions are truths. And thus we return to life as it is, a type of life which has been denied for millennia. At this point Nietzsche meets Zhuangzi again: life is a kind of art—"a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art that, like a pure flame, licks into unclouded skies...There are few things we now know too well, we knowing ones: oh, how we now learn to forget well, and to be good at *not* knowing, as artists" (GS, "Preface for the Second Edition," 3).

Zhuangzi would likely have trouble celebrating with Nietzsche the world of "illusions." Reversing truth and error would not help one to unleash the struggle between opinions and interpretations. It leads one to a never-ending argument about your truth and my truth, your illusion and my illusion, or whose truth is illusion, whose illusion is truth. If there is no truth but illusion, why should we prefer artistic interpretation to that of Platonism and Christianity? Noble tragedy to mass romanticism? Is it not "man's music" which is way below the music of heaven "6000 feet above sea level" (EH: "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 1)?

Nietzsche might have likely replied that he loved war and victory. Life could be made degenerate by certain interpretations; yet life could also be enhanced and transformed by active and creative interpretations. Is not ecstatic celebration of destruction and creation preferable to the stillness of no-mind and just sitting-forgetting? For false judgments and illusions are indispensable conditions of life. Would not renouncing them mean renouncing life?

“Oh!” Zhuangzi would have responded, “Heaven has bestowed life to you, but you’d rather ruin it by arguing whether whiteness and solidity are different, I hope you would not end up as my friend Huishi” (2/4, 5/6, Watson 1968: 42, 76).

## 7 Beyond Good and Evil

What if it is my fate that I have to wage the war of revaluating all values; that I stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia (EH: “Why I am a Destiny,” 1)? Nietzsche thus continues:

And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments (which include the synthetic judgments *a priori*) are the most indispensable for us...that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life. To recognize untruth as a condition of life—that certainly means resisting accustomed value feelings in a dangerous way; and a philosophy that risks this would by that token alone place itself beyond good and evil. (BGE: 4)

Zhuangzi certainly would like to take this risk with Nietzsche. They both relentlessly criticized prevalent morality and values. First of all, if there is no metaphysical reality and no absolute truth, then no categorical imperative or intrinsic goodness (*ren, yi*) can be discovered and justified. Second, morality originated and evolved genealogically on account of certain social and psychological demands for stability, order, and the preservation of certain type of life. Both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche seemed to share the presupposition that in the early societies, those Olympian gods, pre-Yao Chinese, and tragic age Greeks, knew little about morality and did not bar themselves from spontaneous or instinctive activities. At some later point during the course of history, morality came into existence.

Emperors Yao and Shun (circa 2,200 BCE), the great ancestors of Confucian tradition, were responsible for the creation of morality in China. According to Zhuangzi, Yao and Shun were the earliest rulers who governed the nation by inventing the moral principle of *ren* and *yi* (benevolence and righteousness) based on Yao’s loving heart and “good conscience.” Nietzsche, in his *Genealogy of Morals*, argues that morals was first invented by some strong leaders for the sake of the survival and development of their tribes, there was only the contrast between good and bad in terms of the efficiency or success of certain activities. However, activities that help certain societies function have been turned into moral norms carrying with them a serious dichotomy between “good and evil.” In the societies that have developed themselves according to these norms, the herd or slaves with their “bad

conscience,” representing their hatred or resentment toward themselves, their masters and their lives in this world, have, through history, managed to define and codify those norms.

In spite of their different conceptions of the origins of morality, they agreed that the origin and development of morality was a sign of degeneration and a symptom of decadence, though their pictures of human degeneration were somewhat different. This does not mean, of course, that Zhuangzi and Nietzsche envisioned societies without “mores,” that is to say, societies without any patterns of social conduct or interaction. The main problem of the Confucian and the Christian morals they critique is the fixation of their doctrines which have virtually stifled the creative dynamism that allows cultures to grow and develop. Zhuangzi sadly commented that after Yao and Shun, Chinese culture had lost its genuineness and harmony and had undergone catastrophic decline and disintegration. The world and people began to split under these moral categories; moral value and the interests they represented began to manipulate human action, and finally different opinions/values fought each other for the authority of interpreting what *renyi* or morality was. In Nietzsche’s eyes, the decadence of European culture began when Socratic rationalism and Christian morality began to prevail and dominate Europe. An original species, that was born to be master and whose “work is an instinctive creation and imposition of forms” (GM: II, 18), had then been domesticated, castrated and eventually extinguished by herd morality or the ascetic ideal. After all,

That this ideal acquired such power and ruled over men as imperiously as we find it in history, especially wherever the civilization and taming of man has been carried through, expresses a great fact: the *sickliness* of the type of man we have had hitherto, or at least of the tamed man... (GM: III, 13)

Fourthly, since morality is only “a kind of provisional formulation, an interpretation and psychological misunderstanding of something whose real nature could not for a long time be understood or described *as it really was*—a mere word inserted into an old *gap* in human knowledge” (ibid.), it cannot be some universal or absolute “mandate of heaven” and “categorical imperative” as Confucius and Kant respectively put it. So both Nietzsche and Zhuangzi agree that there are only plural, different and changing moral systems brought into existence by different types of people for different “utilities” or purposes during different times. And this plurality of human-all-too-human morality eventually catalyzes the disaster of social disturbance and self-dispersion (Zhuangzi), and the advent of nihilism and “the death of God” (Nietzsche). So the final conclusion about morality for both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche is obviously the same: unless we overcome morality and the worldview it embodies, we can never liberate ourselves from alienation and our enslavement to herd consciousness.

Nietzsche’s sole presumption to cure human sickliness and decadence lies in the task of the *revaluation of all highest values*. The notorious names he called himself, such as “immoralist,” “anti-Christ,” “destroyer,” “creator,” and “Dionysus,” make explicit his stand against traditional (Platonic and Christian) values and his decision

to create new values, the twofold mission of revaluation. With this approach Nietzsche has chosen to cope with the traditional values in ways fundamentally at odds with Zhuangzi's.

Notwithstanding that Nietzsche kept using the phrase "beyond good and evil" and called himself an "immoralist," what he meant by them seemed more about negating and overturning old values rather than going "beyond" them. He says,

Fundamentally, my term *immoralist* involves two negations. For one, I negate a type of man that has so far been considered supreme: the good, the benevolent, the beneficent. And then I negate a type of morality that has become prevalent and predominant as morality itself—the morality of decadence or, more concretely, *Christian morality*. (EH: "Why I am a Destiny," 4)

Indeed, the term "beyond" in Nietzsche's usage refers more often to a state of liberty that results from being a "destroyer," "legislator," "revaluator" or "creator." "Beyond good and evil" can very easily be understood as merely "beyond" Christian morality. He does try harder to replace "good" by "evil," soul by body, slave morality by master morality than to renounce morality completely.

Compared to Nietzsche, Zhuangzi is a radical amoralist who denies the need for moral values totally, and tries to de-value rather than re-value all values. All values are fabricated by humans, they are human opinions driven by various purposes which do nothing but interrupt and violate the natural course of life. Zhuangzi has no intent to justify any particular moral teaching and evaluate any evaluation made by any particular school. What he negates is neither Confucian nor Mohist (Mohist) morality but all moral values manufactured by humans. A liberated person must be a real "amoralist" who acts completely in accordance with no moral obligation but instead with one's own nature, which is an immediate manifestation of "heaven and earth" and the thoroughness between them. An ideal society too must act according to its spontaneous dynamism, because contesting moral doctrines can lead only to exactly that, contest (*zheng* 爭), and it is contest that is precisely the most destructive thing for any society. Morality is but a problem or symptom of a desperate and troublesome life and people, and it deserves to be overcome:

When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit—but wouldn't it be much better if they could forget each other back in the rivers and lakes. Instead of praising the good emperor Yao and condemning evil dictator Jie, it would be much better if one could forget both and stay amidst Dao. (6/2, Watson 1968: 80)

If fish left water they would die no matter how "good" and "moral" they were to each other; if we left our natural life for the sake of a moral doctrine we would perish sooner or later in the same way. To this extent we can say that Zhuangzi is a more radical "immoralist" than Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's revaluation, as I have noted, is to enhance life through constant self-overcoming, transforming and annihilating. "Whoever wants to be a creator in good and evil, must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the greatest goodness: but this is—being creative" (EH: "Why I am a destiny," 2). And this is what is really meant by "beyond good and evil." In the process of

continual destruction and creation there can never be any constant good and evil. Striving for the process of destroying and creating values is thereby the nature of Nietzsche's task of revaluation.

In contrast, Zhuangzi's de-valuation is neither reversing nor creating values but removing them from our heart-mind along with all controversial opinions so that they can no longer interfere with or interrupt the actual course of nature (*ziran*). Zhuangzi emphatically and deliberately cultivates the idea of *wuwei* (doing nothing or non-doing), *ziran* (self-so or thus-so), *wuyong* (useless or no-use), and *xujing* (虛靜, void and still), as *daos* (ways) of reaching thoroughness of nature and life. So Zhuangzi's de-valuation is more of an inward transformation of one's heart-mind and perspective rather than the action (*wei*) of changing, destroying and creating things. To create as well as to destroy subjectively for Zhuangzi means no more than to cause trouble and generate blockage and disharmony in life. No values need to be created for an instinctive, spontaneous and free life. Life in essence, as it is, is creativity. For life lives, the value of life needs not be valued!

It is very hard to reconcile the two masters at this particular point. For Zhuangzi, Nietzsche's revaluation would maintain its task of overcoming morality within the territory of human-all-too-human evaluation, which may be effective in criticizing and destroying traditional values but may not be capable of crossing over "beyond good and evil." Every time a value is reversed or created, all you have done is have the old table of values changed and another kind of artificial system imposed. Yet the confrontation, the antinomy of "good" and "evil," remains unsolved. In the same way, Nietzsche's passion for creativity would seem to Zhuangzi problematic as well. Unless revaluation at last de-values itself and really goes beyond "good and evil," no creativity or genuine freedom can be achieved.

Nietzsche would likely have accused Zhuangzi of being passive and nihilistic at this point. If life is interpretation and evaluation, why shouldn't we affirm it? True revaluation still causes trouble and suffering, but it also brings joy and the harvest of creativity. What if life is contradiction, confrontation, and will to power; what if life is to fight, conquer and suffer; why should we be afraid to affirm and live it? My "beyond good and evil," Nietzsche might say, does not mean "beyond life"; it suggests instead "the affirmation of passing away *and destroying*, which is the decisive feature of Dionysian philosophy; saying Yes to opposition and war" (EH: "The birth of tragedy," 3). Not to affirm life in this way is to be no different than those ascetic priests or Confucian saints.

This kind of disagreement seems to have no end. But when we notice what Zhuangzi and Nietzsche try to protect and revive, we see that the difference between revaluation and de-valuation is not as great as it appears. The ultimate concerns of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche are very similar, no matter how different their approaches may seem. Both philosophers are destined to overcome the all-too-human and to return to and ultimately affirm the nature of life as it is. "Man is something that shall be overcome" (Z: Prologue, 1), just as language, knowledge, belief in truth and all highest values, must be overcome all together, not because these ideas could or could not find a limited justification, but because they are "slanders of nature." Zhuangzi couldn't agree more when Nietzsche speaks thus:

I find those people disagreeable in whom every natural inclination immediately becomes a sickness, something that disfigures them or is downright infamous: it is *they* that have seduced us to hold that man's inclinations and instincts are evil. *They* are the cause of our great injustice against our nature, there are enough people who *might well* entrust themselves to their instincts with grace and without care; but they do not, from fear of this imagined "evil character" of nature. That is why we find so little nobility among men; for it will always be the mark of nobility that one feels no fear of oneself, expects nothing infamous of oneself, flies without scruples where we feel like flying, we freeborn birds. Wherever we may come there will always be freedom and sunlight around us. (GS: 294)

It is these "people" who say or think natural instincts are "evil," Zhuangzi would claim, not nature itself, which make moral distinctions. Once we have removed all moral evaluations we stand right at the *middle* of the earth and heaven (i.e., interality) and dance with the ten thousand things.

## 8 Living in this World: The Genuine Person and *Übermensch*

When asked: "What is heaven (*tian*)? What is human?" Ruo of the North Sea replied: "Horses and oxen have four feet—this is called heaven; putting a halter on the horse's head and piercing the ox's nose—this is called human" (17/1, Watson 1968: 183). According to Zhuangzi, human beings originally were part of nature or heaven (*tian*) and came into being by natural transformation (*wuhua* 物化). It might not be so bad if we used the resources bestowed by nature, i.e. riding horses and driving oxen, without harming them or devastating nature. Yet things would become extremely ugly if humans were to put halters on their own heads and pierce their noses. This is, unfortunately, what the position of humans was in Zhuangzi's time.

Just as Nietzsche loved ancient Greece, Zhuangzi was nostalgic about an earlier time when people enjoyed their peaceful and spontaneous lives. But with the development of so-called civilization, with the inventions of politics, morality, knowledge and technology, human beings began to lose their concordance with nature (*ziran*). The oneness of the world fell apart, the original harmony of chaos and differences evolved into jostlings and wars. Being apart from nature and fixed by all those artificial opinions and normative regulations, human life became confounded (*mang* 茫) and its throughness of transformation became blocked:

Once a man receives this fixed bodily form, he refuses to transform himself [with the nature of becoming] waiting for the end. Struggling and clashing with things, he always hustles himself into action and nothing can stop him. Is he not pathetic? Sweating and laboring to the end of his days and never seeing his accomplishment, utterly exhausting himself and never knowing where to return to his home—is this not a sorrow? What good is that if there is no death? When body decays and the mind follows it—is this not a greater sorrow? Is human life supposed to be this confounded? How could I be the only confounded one, and others not? (2/2, Watson 1968: 38)

"Do you hear? Do you hear, O Zarathustra?" "The cry is for you. It calls you: Come, come, come! It is time! It is high time" (Z: IV, "The Cry for Distress")! Zarathustra has heard it and agreed. "The earth" he said, "has a skin, and this skin has diseases.

One of these diseases, for example, is called ‘man’ (Z: II, “On Great Events”). For the sake of “the meaning of the earth” and a healthy life, both Nietzsche and Zhuangzi found a remedy for their diagnosis: “man is something that must be overcome!” Being merely human is a denial of the human and a fetter of freedom. Human nature and freedom cannot be regained or obtained until men and women have overcome themselves. Zhuangzi and Nietzsche not only have provided the most acute criticism and profound diagnosis of the problems of humanity but also prescriptions to cure and liberate them. Both thinkers thus proposed their ideal types of human kind: the genuine person (*zhenren* 真人) and *Übermensch*.

In the Daoist tradition, *wuwei* is not literally understood as non-doing, non-action or non-effort, but as an ultimate state of thoroughness in reference to either the reality of the universe or of spirituality.<sup>10</sup> Since humans have split away from Dao for so long, regaining our spontaneity and genuinity is not an easy task. It requires enormous courage and effort to practice and fulfill such a task. To reach the state of *wuwei*, one should do (*wei*) a lot of work. This doing of not doing is called *xiu* 脩 or *xiuyang* 脩養 in Chinese, meaning perfecting self or self-cultivation. Going through this practice (*gongfu*, 功夫) of *xiu* is the only path for the accomplishment of self-overcoming. Zhuangzi has created some special methods of *xiu* which are very influential in Chinese culture because they can be applied both spiritually and physically. The whole work of *Zhuangzi*, especially the seven Inner Chapters, can be understood as the Dao of *xiu* which leads to the ultimate state of thoroughness of self-transformation or self-overcoming, which is also called *xiaoyaoyou*, translated by Watson as “free and easy wandering.” A person capable of *xiaoyaoyou*, capable of dancing with the world, freed from the limit of the human-all-to-human language, knowledge, social and political norms etc., is called *zhenren* or the genuine person.

The state of *Xiaoyaoyou* (ch. 1) sets up the model of the state of ultimate liberation and freedom (*tong* or thoroughness) on which all the following chapters and discussions revolve and toward which all practice and cultivation are oriented. The ultimate state of freedom can only be attained by those who have overcome themselves, from the fixation of their heart-mind in self, merit and name, and thus obtaining the spirit of non-reliance (*wudai*) on things and opinions.

If one had mounted the nature of heaven and earth, ridden the changes of its six breaths, and thus danced with the boundless, then what would he have had to depend on? Therefore it says that Perfect Man has no self; the Spiritual Man has no merit, the Sage has no name. (1/1, Watson 1968: 32)

<sup>10</sup> Some conceive Zhuangzi as a kind of escapist and ascetic (see Chen 1991: 115–129). Zhuangzi has an anti-government and anti-social attitude but, I argue, he has never, at least in his *Inner Chapters*, suggested we should withdraw from social life. Different from ascetics or escapists, he emphasizes spiritual cultivation and liberation of the individuals. Once you are liberated you can live anywhere you wish and be anything you want to be. There is no need to escape life like some religions advocate. Zhuangzi may be disengaged from political positions but never renounces life within the world.



To be a genuine person of *xiaoyaoyou* is to be one with *ziran* and to dance with the rhythm and flow of life in an absolute affirmative state of heart-mind. This is very similar to Nietzsche's Dionysian spirit, the active will to power which says "Yes" to life as it is. However, Nietzsche's *dao* of achieving this state is somehow different. His self-overcoming is achieved through being stronger, through being master or commander, noble or great, a creator and legislator, that is to say (borrowing an image from the *Zhuangzi*), to be *kunpeng*, the gigantic fish-bird (1/1, Watson 1968: 27). But Zhuangzi might comment that there is no object and authoritarian standard to determine what is really strong or vast and what is their opposite. All these are just relative attributes in accordance with certain circumstances and perspectives. The strong could be weak when compared to something stronger. To be a master one may become a slave because the master relies on the servants' obedience. The stage of being master has not yet surpassed the stage of dependence, which is perhaps why Nietzsche finally prefers the image of the child as the symbol of liberation, an image that is often forgotten or overlooked by his readers (Z: "Three Metamorphoses").

From chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* onward, a detailed manual of how to obtain the state of *xiaoyaoyou* or become a *zhenren* is provided. To make it through all opinions of things,<sup>11</sup> or the *Qi Wu-lun* (chapter 2), is the fundamental stage of liberating our heart-mind from all kinds of fixations and attachments. The *zhenren* also knows how to nurture and take care of her life, both mentally and physically, and lives life up to its completion. This is the theme of the *Yangshengzhu* 養生主 (chapter 3), or "the Key of Nurturing Life." The Cook Ding story presents the best example of the way of nurturing and completing life by attaining the state of thoroughness.<sup>12</sup> If one follows nature and penetrates through cracks between bones spontaneously, the ox will be cut without extra effort and the knife (body) will not be dulled. The genuine person thus is capable of being "*Dechongfu*" (德充符, chapter 5), or "Virtuosity Adequate and Conformable," and the person capable of following "*Dazongshi*" (大宗師, chapter 6), or "the Great Principal Model" that is the genuinity or authenticity of her own. With a vacant heart-mind (*xushi* 虛室) which no longer knows distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, I and the other, big and small, even life

<sup>11</sup> I choose to interpret *qi* 齊 as *tong* 通, or "making through" instead of "identify" or "equalize" as conventionally rendered. The key of *qi* is to non-differentiate or non-discriminate different opinions (*wulun* 物論) rather than identify or equalize them into some kind of conformity. To me, the latter sounds very alien to Zhuangzi's idea of *qi* *wulun*. In the Chinese tradition of classical studies, interchangeability or synonymy of words or characters, is called *tongjia* 通假 or borrowing/rendering (*jia*) through (*tong*) each other. Therefore *tong* has such a dual meanings: resemblance [of the opinions] and thoroughness without changing or forcing something on different opinions.

<sup>12</sup> Some Western scholars mistakenly distorted Zhuangzi's idea of "skillfulness" to rescue him from the charge of relativism or skepticism. Lee H. Yearley even asserts: "Skillful activity, then, clearly points to the highest spiritual state" (Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996: 164). Just the opposite, Zhuangzi pointed out explicitly that the skillfulness and the use of technological devices would generate "fixed mind" and "cunning heart" which could only harm our health and nature. At the outset of the cook Ding story, which these scholars use as basic textual evidence, Ding said clearly: "What I care for is Dao which goes beyond skill."

and death, one attains ultimate enlightenment and freedom and becomes a person of Dao or a genuine person (6/1, Watson 1968: 77–80) who walks *through* interality, affirms and embraces all things that become, appear, change, decay and die in this life-world, or *Renjianshi* (人間世, chapter 4). Finally, this type of person can always do best with no special effort in any position she or he is destined to have, such as a peasant, an artisan, a poet, a cook, a scholar, a hermit, a minister, or a king, an emperor. After the completion of self-overcoming and transformation, everybody is a king and emperor herself, or at least, capable of being a *zhenren* who has sagehood inside and kingship outside (Chapter 7, *Yingdiwang* 應帝王, or “Fit for Emperors and Kings”). This is what Zhuangzi would have defined as the *zhenren*, or the *Übermensch* in Nietzsche’s terms.

In chapter 6, Zhuangzi presents the *zhenren* in a more figurative fashion: a *zhenren* does not rebel against want, does not show off success, and does not deliberate about her doings; thus she cannot be frightened by height nor drowned by water nor burnt by fire; she has no discrimination against either life or death, letting it come and go as the natural course of transformation; her mind forgets, her face calms, her forehead widens, she is chilly like autumn and balmy like spring; her delight and fury go along with the four seasons; she can fly like Kun-Peng thousands of miles up in the air and be carefree like little birds easing down to the field; she is perfectly one with heaven and earth, she *is* heaven and earth (6/17, Watson 1968: 77–80).

On the other hand, Nietzsche describes his ideal of the *Übermensch* this way:

The word “*Übermensch*”, as the designation of a type of supreme achievement, as opposed to “modern” men, to “good” men, to Christian and other nihilists—a word that in the mouth of a Zarathustra, the annihilator of morality, becomes a very pensive word—has been understood almost everywhere with the utmost innocence in the sense of those very values whose opposite Zarathustra was meant to represent—that is, as an “idealistic” type of a higher kind of man, half “saint”, half “genius”. (EH: “Why I write such good books,” 1)

The *Übermensch* is the person who has overcome him- or herself as an alienated human-all-too-human being; he/she: puts behind every highest value and creates his/her new values merely by actively following his/her instinct of freedom and will to power; is an immoralist and goes beyond good and evil; is strong physically and mentally and capable of destroying and creating; is a Dionysian artist who enjoys, affirms and says Yes to everything and becomes and dies in the world of appearances; laughs, dances, ascends high and goes under ecstatically as a drunken god; and after all, *Übermensch* is “the meaning of the earth” (Z: “Prologue,” 3)

Compared to Zhuangzi, Nietzsche did not provide detailed methods of self-overcoming and self-transforming. His teaching is more conceptual, more philosophical than practical. Revaluation, genealogy, psychology and typology are his hammers of philosophizing. Scattered among them, though, there are some suggestions for practice here and there. Perhaps it is because, as he has confessed, “I am too inquisitive, too questionable, too exuberant to stand for any gross answer” (EH: “Why I am so clever,” 9). Perhaps he considers his thinking merely an experiment, a signpost for future mankind. Perhaps he insists that everybody should try his/her way all by him- or herself. Perhaps,

By many ways, in many ways, I reached my truth: it was not on one ladder that I climbed to the height where my eyes roam over my distance. And it was only reluctantly that I ever inquired about the way: that always offended my taste. I preferred to question and try out the ways themselves.

A trying and questioning was my every move; and verily, one must also learn to answer such questioning. That, however, is my taste—not good, not bad, but *my* taste of which I am no longer ashamed and which I have no wish to hide.

“This is *my* way; where is yours?”—thus I answered those who asked me “the way.” For *the* way—that does not exist.

Thus spoke Zarathustra. (Z, III, “On the spirit of Gravity,” 2)

However, the general requirement or orientation for a self-overcoming practice is not lacking in Nietzsche: to twist free from traditional values; to go back to one’s instinct and body; to be master, noble and destroyer; to be yourself and a creator of yourself; to be a child—“and above all I learn to stand and walk and run and jump and climb and dance” (ibid.).

At first glance these do not look compatible with Zhuangzi’s teaching and opposites seem at once to appear: for example, passion vs. vacancy, competition vs. disengagement, the master who commands vs. the sage who embraces, being self vs. losing self, frenzy vs. detachment, etc. Perhaps such distinctions are inappropriate if we maintain a dualistic, either/or mode of thinking here. They may be contradictions but may not contradict or conflict each other; they may be different but may create a similar spirit. If we change our perspectives from the customary one, perhaps we can ascend from them to the height of affirming spirit.

## 9 Conclusion: Ultimate Affirmation of Life

The ultimate concern for both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche is to liberate humans from the human-all-too-human boundaries of their freedom through various ways of overcoming and cultivation. Both have used the metaphor of the child to describe the person who reaches the ultimate state of liberation—the genuine person or *Übermensch*.

Now, from this highest stage of human liberation, looking back over those aforementioned discrepancies between Zhuangzi and Nietzsche, we find that they are no longer as incompatible as they once seemed. Both Zhuangzi’s devaluation and Nietzsche’s revaluation are aimed at returning humankind back to its genuine nature (*ziran*). They both advocate instinct and spontaneous activities beyond good and evil and all human-made boundaries. Zhuangzi favors disengagement from human competition because he thinks this is the best way to overcome competition, which is conceived as the real victory of all competition. On the other hand, Nietzsche often talks about the innocence and the child as the highest state of self-overcoming in which all fighting will be over (Z: “Three Metamorphoses”).

By the same token, Zhuangzi's notion of "non-self" could be seen, on the one hand, as a way to achieve the genuine self by forgetting the artificial self. What we normally call the "self" is either a conception or image that is imposed upon us by authoritarian traditions and ideologies. Only if we overcome or forget such a self can we discover our authentic self-nature or no-self-nature. On the other hand, Zhuangzi's forgetfulness of self is the way to regain the sovereignty of a genuine self. Such a self never compromises with rulers and the crowd of the marketplaces, but creates a free and unique individual who can even swim in filthy water without being contaminated. Nietzsche seems to have a similar sense of the self. He remarks in Zarathustra's teaching on the *Übermensch*: "I love him whose soul is overfull so that he forgets himself, and all things are in him: thus all things spell his going under" (Z: "Prologue," 4). Put together, non-self is a genuine self and a genuine self is non-self, because for both philosophers, becoming oneself is to be one with nature.

Some readers may wonder if Zhuangzi is at root a cold-blooded ascetic unable even to mourn at his wife's funeral. The story may sound outrageous at the outset but not after Zhuangzi explained himself. Zhuangzi's wife died. When Huizi went to convey his condolence, he found Zhuangzi sitting with his legs sprawled out, pounding on a tub and singing. "You lived with her, she brought up your children and grew old," said Huizi, "it should be enough simply not to weep at her death. But pounding on a tub and singing—this is going too far, isn't it?"

Zhuangzi said, "You are wrong. When she first died, do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her origin but saw no birth, not only did I see no birth but no form either, not only did I see no form but no breath (*qi*) either. It was in the midst of the chaos of wonder and mystery that a change took place and a breath was risen; then a change of the breath brought forms into being; then a change of forms brought my wife's birth. Today there was another change and she died. It is just like the progression of the four seasons. Now she is going to lie down peacefully in a vast hall [of nature]. If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I don't get through (*tong*) the fate of life. So I stopped." (18/2, Watson 1968: 191–192)

What we learn from this story is Zhuangzi's celebration of the natural process of becoming and transformation and his overcoming of the opposition between life and death. I see in him rather the Dionysian frenzy or tragic spirit that Nietzsche came to celebrate. Moreover, Zhuangzi did not ask us to eliminate human desires, but rather to avoid becoming obsessed or attached so that we can regain our suppressed spontaneity and naturalness. A genuine person, therefore, can "thing things without being thinged by things" (20/1, Watson 1968: 210)<sup>13</sup> and sets free her passions and affections as part of her nature, and allows sorrow and joy to display themselves along with the four seasons.

From the appearance of the words "genuine person" and "*Übermensch*" we may get the impression that "*Übermensch*" seems more aggressive and transcendent,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This is my literal translation of *wuwuerbuwuyuwu* 物物而不物于物.

<sup>14</sup> The translation "superman" and the exaggerations of it depicted in literature and movies are responsible for the misconceptions about Nietzsche's idea of *Übermensch*, who in fact has nothing to do with this sort of "superman."

while the “genuine person” sounds more down to the earth and spontaneous. I do not think such a conclusion is satisfactory. As I mentioned before, Zhuangzi’s “returning” and Nietzsche’s “overcoming” are neither contradictory nor opposite but compatible and reciprocal, for the genuine person and the *Übermensch* have returned to their nature and thus have overcome the inauthentic humanity. So returning is overcoming and vice versa; they are not heading in opposite directions but one: to be “the meaning of the earth” or “one with heaven and earth,” and ultimately, to reach the state of liberation and freedom which lies in an unconditional, childlike, Dionysian affirmation of life as it is. Returning is overcoming. Liberation is affirmation. Liberation or freedom is not a negation of this world nor a rejection of life as such. It is rather a divine affirmation and a sacred saying “Yes” to this world and this life. What is this world? What is this life? What is it that Zhuangzi and Nietzsche want to affirm?

It is this world that must be affirmed: the earth covered by blue heaven and lighted by the sun, the natural world in which all species are breeding, as well as instinct, body, will to power, and everything spontaneous. To be natural and spontaneous is to open up oneself completely to nature with the least *human* regulation and interference. What should be overcome are not sensual desires, passions and affection, but human-all-too-human *ressentiment* or attachment which has tried by all means to suppress everything spontaneous or genuine in us. To be *through as one* with heaven and earth (*ziran*), to be *through as one* with the flux of becoming (Dionysus), with the openness of interality, that is freedom and liberation for Zhuangzi and Nietzsche.

It is this life, no matter how terrible, how difficult, how tragic it is, that must be affirmed. People tend to appreciate life when it is happy and blame it when it is difficult, which is why they often end up exhausted in seeking to preserve happiness and prevent hardship. Zhuangzi suggests that life changes as an infinite process of becoming which no one can grasp rationally. This process is called *ming* or fate. A true person never bothers to know what or why fate *is* as such, but simply accepts and affirms what is *happening* to her. Nor does she have any preference for what fate or destiny brings to her, even with the situation of life and death. Like Zhuangzi, Nietzsche’s affirmation of life is ultimately tested by his love of fate—*Amor Fati*—and the idea of eternal recurrence. Everything that happens in one’s life should be affirmed and willed to happen again, once more and numerous times more.

With such an affirmative heart-mind, one is able to say: “All days shall be holy to me” (Z: II, “The Dancing Song”) and becomes a free dancer, wanderer, laughter and creator of herself.

For both thinkers, life is conceived as a vivid and dynamic manifestation of interality which flows constantly and recurs eternally. Projecting concepts like “morality,” “being,” “logos,” “substance,” or “truth” onto life, as is done in traditional ontology, distorts, if not rejects, life’s real nature. Life is not a fixed thing. Life presents, unfolds, and *throughs* within the flux of interality. In other words, in order to obtain a spiritual affirmation, life should be understood and interpreted from the perspective of interality, not Being.

In short, I am convinced by this comparative study that the thinking of both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche are versions of a “new” ground or horizon of interality. Despite their obvious differences, they share the same core perspective, which can be highlighted across so many instances. I hope this study not only provides an alternative mode of thinking grounded on interality, but creates yet another opportunity for us to ideate a natural convergence of Eastern and Western thought.

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# Chapter 33

## Heidegger and the German Reception of the *Zhuangzi*



Eric S. Nelson

### 1 Introduction

Heidegger reportedly received a copy of the German translation of *The Book of Tea* (a work inspired in part by both Zen Buddhism and Daoism) by Kakuzō Okakura in 1919. This work coined the German expression, utilized to describe human existence in *Being and Time* (1927), *In-der-Welt-sein* (being-in-the world).<sup>1</sup> His friend the German writer Heinrich Wiegand Petzet (1909–1997) recounted in his *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1929–1976* how Heidegger visited Bremen in October 1930 to give a lecture that would eventually become “On the Essence of Truth” (*Von Wesen der Wahrheit*) in which he discussed the *Daodejing* 28 passage on light and darkness in relation to the unconcealing and concealing of being.<sup>2</sup> Heidegger surprised everyone at a dinner party after the talk by asking his host for a copy of an obscure book called the *Speeches and Parables of Zhuangzi* (*Reden und gleichnisse des Tschuang-tse*) that has been translated from two English translations around two decades earlier by Martin Buber.<sup>3</sup> Heidegger proceeded to

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<sup>1</sup>Imamichi 2004: 123; Okakura 1919; on this history, see Davis 2020: 161. Note that some parts of the current chapter overlap with Nelson 2019: 362–384.

<sup>2</sup>Petzet 1993. For an overview of the relation between Heidegger and East Asian philosophy, see Davis 2013: 459–471; Davis 2020: 161–196; May 1996; Nelson 2017.

<sup>3</sup>Buber, 1910. On the significance of Buber’s interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* in relation to Heidegger, see chapter 4 of Nelson 2017: 109–129. For an overview of Buber’s translation and interpretation, see Herman, 1996. On his relationship with Daoism, see Eber 1994: 445–464; Nelson 2020b: 105–120; Wirth 2020: 121–134.

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read the Zhuangzian story about the joy of fish and the joy of watching the fish from the bridge above, a story that sets off a conversation between Zhuang Zhou (莊周; Zhuangzi 莊子) and Hui Shi (惠施; Huizi 惠子) on the possibility of genuinely recognizing the joy of fish, delving into its meaning for his audience (Petzet 1993: 18).

It seems time and again as if Heidegger more eagerly expressed his interests in Daoist sources and East Asian art and culture during his visits to Bremen. There he discussed and drew on the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* in lectures and conversations in 1930, 1949, 1951, and 1960. Heidegger's cosmopolitan intercultural engagements in this culturally open Hanseatic trading city were due in part to his shared East Asian interests with his Bremen friend Petzet who describes at length Heidegger's interests in East Asian philosophy, culture, and art. In addition to 1930, he discussed in Bremen the empty vessel of *Daodejing* 11 in his 1949 lectures, *dao* and *lógos* in 1951, and the wood-carver from the *Zhuangzi* in his 1960 lecture "Image and Word" ("Bild und Wort").

Another Bremen author Hans Jürgen Seekamp, best known for his work on the poet Stefan George, noted Heidegger's engagement with Daoism and reflections on the meaning of *dao* during his 1951 lecture on *Lógos* in Bremen—where, he adds, people have "a cultivated sense for Asia"—in a short 1960 article published in the Indian publication *United Asia* (Seekamp 1960: 71–72). He notes that Europe has not yet genuinely comprehended or built a bridge with Asia, despite the many poetic and philosophical inspirations of the East in the Occident and the German poets and intellectuals who have actively embraced and advocated it.

In speaking of potentially building a genuine bridge in the future, Seekamp introduces Heidegger and his hesitation concerning whether linguistic agreement is possible, the central topic of "From a Dialogue on Language." Seekamp concludes his essay by quoting from Heidegger's talk: "We do not know what really is meant when we hear people say 'Tao', since we do not think the word in its native language, nor can we at all imitate such a thought."<sup>4</sup> The *dao* speaks no doubt to the Occident that does not have ears to comprehend it. Heidegger might hear it to some extent yet is reticent to speak of it. Perhaps he is following the advice of *Daodejing* 56 that those who speak do not know and those who know do not speak ("知者不言, 言者不知").

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<sup>4</sup>Seekamp 1960: 72. Compare Ernst Bloch's claim that Laozi's *dao* appears simultaneously the easiest category to grasp and the most incomprehensible from the European perspective (Bloch 1959, vol. 2: 1445). Bloch also defines *dao* as a variety of life- and world-tact (Bloch 1959, vol. 2: 1438).

## 2 Heidegger Between *Pólemos* and *Gelassenheit*

Reticence and reserve are virtues safeguarding what is hidden for Heidegger. His public reticence does not negate his long-history of attentiveness to the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. This attention seemingly disappears between 1931 and 1942, an era of the primacy of the will in his thought. His attention resumes and takes an intriguing and more visible turn in 1943 with “The Uniqueness of the Poet.” This initiates a period in which he seriously studies the Daoist classics and critically reevaluates, even if inadequately for his critics, the disastrous failures of National Socialism. He reassesses his own philosophy and the dangers of his own previous discourse of decision, creative conflict and violent confrontation (*pólemos*), self-assertion, and the primacy of the will. He heavily relied on this discursive configuration in his early advocacy, as rector of the University of Freiburg during 1933–1935, on behalf of the new National Socialist regime’s coercive fusion and co-ordination (*Gleichschaltung*) of all aspects of university life and German existence with devastating consequences.

How did Heidegger’s thinking shift from an apologetic and ideologically-driven sacrificial ethics of *pólemos* and work toward the freedom of letting releasement (*lassen*), from the creative violent holding-sway of being as *phúsis* toward the auto-poietic self-ordering (*ziran*) of things and world in the holding sway of being as nearing *dao*? One source of this anticipatory shifting toward, albeit never arriving there given the distance and hesitation between Europe and Asia in Heidegger’s thinking, is the *Zhuangzi*.

This text reports repeated refusals of coercive political participation and coordination. Zhuangzi would rather in the “Autumn Floods” chapter be a turtle freely and uselessly meandering on the muddy riverbank than serving usefully and embalmed in the prince’s court. In addition to such an anti-politics, there is also an agrarian politics of egalitarian simplicity without distinctions between ruler and ruled expressed in passages of the *Zhuangzi*, the *Liezi*, and negatively in Ge Hong’s “Against Bao” (*Jie Bao* 詰鮑) chapter of the *Baopuzi* where this tendency is condemned.

The idea of a free and equal self-generative and self-ordering politics was linked with anarchistic socialism in Julius Hart and Martin Buber in fin-de-siècle Germany. *Dao* is an anarchy in which the conflict and cacophony of things gives birth to harmony in Hart’s poetic utopian vision (Hart 1905: 51–52). The *Zhuangzi* was allied with anarchism and individualism in its early twentieth-century German reception. Richard Wilhelm described this tendency as expressing an anarchistic ideal of a golden age without rulers (Wilhelm 1929: 40). Liang Chiang (Liang Qiang 梁强) described, in a 1938 German language Jena dissertation on Chinese economics and society, Chinese history as a dialectic between authoritarian communalism and anarchistic individualism beginning with Laozi and Zhuangzi (Chiang 1938: 69). The exiled German sinologist Werner Eichhorn illuminated Zhuangzian freedom against the background of totalitarianism (Eichhorn 1942: 140–162).

Although one should beware exaggerating the importance of the *Zhuangzi*, and its sense of freedom for Heidegger during the closing years of the Second World War, his Zhuangzian inspired reflections on letting, waiting, and uselessness in a defeated and occupied Germany in “Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and an Older Man” (1945), published in *Country Path Conversations*, implement a radically different *ethos* of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) and variations on letting (*lassen*) with reference to the *Zhuangzi* (by way of the editions of Buber and Wilhelm). The focus on the thing (in the expansive sense) rather than God and soul points toward more than the *Gelassenheit* familiar from German sources from Meister Eckhart, Jakob Böhme, and Schelling to the modern paradigm of mysticism.

Heidegger was, as Löwith remarked, a philosopher of usefulness, the purposive for-the-sake-of which, the thing-in-the-work, and the event of being that are the opposite of Daoism (Löwith 1983: 600). How did Heidegger become a thinker that evoked and addressed Lao-Zhuang (as mediated by the translations of Buber and Wilhelm) forms of uselessness, freedom from purposiveness, and letting the thing be in its own way of being? Löwith’s suspicions are partly right. Heidegger’s Daoist oriented reflections from 1943 to 1950 are delimited by his cultural, philosophical, and political concerns, presuppositions, and his interpretive situation.

Heidegger’s reflections disclose considerable Daoist related elements in his post-1943 thinking. His postwar “thought-poems” speak of turning between being and nothingness, releasement while remaining oneself in transforming and wandering, being freely underway without goal or purpose, and the waiting in which one becomes one’s own and people and things are granted their return to stillness (GA 13: 27; GA 81: 23, 39, 57–58, 75, 215). A number of his thought-poems and previously unpublished notes are evocative of an interculturally entangled and mediated Daoist *ethos* and imaginary from which Heidegger drew in conjunction with his more conspicuous early Greek and German poetic sources.

The Daoist motifs adopted by Heidegger cannot be said to designate a “Daoist turn” as such. Still, they are symptomatic of an encounter and engagement. Such Daoist traces and touches are not accidental or contingent facets of Heidegger’s later thinking. These facets reveal different prospects for an *ethos* of letting and releasing things and persons and concern other vital motifs of his mature philosophy: usefulness and uselessness, the thing, technology, poetic thinking, dwelling, elemental words, and emptiness and nothingness.

### 3 Heidegger, Zhuangzi, and the Freedom of Nature

Heidegger refers more frequently to words and images associated with the Laozi, as evident in the 1949 *Bremen Lectures* and in multiple discussions of the thing. He does express, directly and more typically indirectly, familiarity with the German language *Zhuangzi* editions of Martin Buber (1910) and Richard Wilhelm (1912). Confirming this persistent attention to the *Zhuangzi*, Heidegger evokes it

throughout the 1944–45 third *Country Path Conversation*. He cited Buber’s selections from the *Zhuangzi* in the 1960 Bremen lecture “Image and Word.”<sup>5</sup> Heidegger refers here to the instructive portrayal of the artisan of the “bell-stand” in Buber’s *Zhuangzi* chapter 19, “Fulfilling Life” (*dasheng* 達生). In this narrative, “a non-instrumental artistry is an image of how to live. The wooden bell stand (*Glockenspielstande*) appears as if it were the work of spirits and is formed through a responsive artistry that is born of the ‘fasting that calms the heart-mind’ (*zhai yi jing xin* 齋以靜心) without relying on instrumental technique, skill, expectation, or calculation.”<sup>6</sup>

Heidegger addresses the uselessness of things and words through the “necessity of the unnecessary” and the “usefulness of uselessness” (*wuyong zhiyong* 無用之用) in the *Zhuangzi* in the third of the *Country Path Conversations* and in his 1962 lecture “Transmitted and Technological Language” in which he ponders the “languageing” (the “it speaks”) of language. The connection between spontaneity and calculation, usefulness and uselessness appears in Heidegger’s 1945 and 1962 references to Wilhelm’s translation of the *Zhuangzi* that is the primary focus of the present chapter. *Zhuangzi*’s “useful uselessness,” exhibited in a series of narratives in which the useless thing (in the expansive sense of stone, tree, person, and so on) flourishes while the useful thing is consumed and used up in its use, becomes the condition of use in contrast with the thing being principally characterized by its ready-to-hand pragmatic availability and usability. Instrumental usefulness suppresses and forgets while presupposing the thing in the functioning (*zhiyong*) of its non-use (*wuyong*) and self-so-ing of itself (*ziran*).

There are several passages that help contextualize the notion of the thing and use in the *Zhuangzi*. In the outer chapter “Knowledge’s Northern Rambling” (*zhibeiyou* 知北遊), it is noted that “what things the thing is not itself the thing” (“物物者非物”) and in the outer chapter “Mountain Tree” (*shanmu* 山木) that the genuine person lets “things thing without being thinged by things” (“物物而不物於物”). This need not entail a rejection of thing *qua* thing if it signifies undoing the fixation of self and thing and, by implication in the modern situation, subject and object through the recognition of their emptiness. It is its own emptiness or nothingness and self-naturing (that is, the thinglessness of things) that things (gathers) the thing. The exemplary attunement with things is one of uselessness and non-purposiveness. This lets things thing, as they are of themselves, while remaining in a comportment that is free, at ease, and undetermined (unthinged) by the thinging of things. This is *Zhuangzi*’s freedom with and amidst and thick of things and world.

<sup>5</sup> GA 74: 185. Compare Petzet 1993: 169; Nelson 2017: 120.

<sup>6</sup> Nelson 2017: 120. Herman renders “wooden bell-stand” as “chime-post” (Herman 1996: 59). The received text states: 梓慶削木為鐻，鐻成，見者驚猶鬼神。魯侯見而問焉，曰：“子何術以為焉？”對曰：“臣工人，何術之有！雖然，有一焉。臣將為鐻，未嘗敢以耗氣也，必齋以靜心。齊三日，而不敢懷慶賞爵祿；齊五日，不敢懷非譽巧拙；齊七日，輒然忘吾有四枝形體也。當是時也，無公朝，其巧專而外骨消；然後入山林，觀天性；形軀至矣，然後成見鐻，然後加手焉；不然則已。則以天合天，器之所以疑神者，其是與？”

(Guo 1961: 658–659).

Heidegger's later reflections concerning uselessness diverges from its deployment in the texts of the mid-1930s. It is an expression that Heidegger recurrently revisits in his later works, typically without either directly or indirectly referring to the *Zhuangzi*, where it is coordinated with the letting go of *Gelassenheit* that steps back from coercive creating and willing as well as instrumental calculation and usage. It would be overly simplistic to describe Heidegger's trajectory from decisionist voluntarism to fatalistic passivism. It is also insufficient to identify his releasement solely with German mysticism or Daoism. Letting releasement does not signify in Heidegger's works an otherworldly mystical unification of the soul with God or a fixed passivity. Heidegger repeatedly denies that his thought is a form of mysticism (GA 77: 109, 185). As Otto Pöggeler notes of Heidegger's final conversations with Bernhard Welte, Heidegger's study of Eckhart and mysticism led him not to God and the soul but to the things that form way and place: "God was only God in the 'unspoken' language of the 'things' by the country path" (Pöggeler 1987: 47).

Letting releasement, with its clear Eckhartian roots, acquires a less monotheistic and quasi-Daoistic tone and style in Heidegger's thinking. His releasement functions in significant ways like *wuwei* that was long associated with letting (*laissez* from old Germanic *lazan*) and even *laissez faire* in the French reception of Chinese philosophy since as early as François Quesnay's physiocracy that signified government by *phúsis* interpreted as *laissez faire*. *Wuwei* is not an economic policy in early Daoist texts. It is an intra-worldly art of being-in-the-world that empties, quiets, and simplifies the self, desire, and will with humility while releasing things to themselves and their own essencing that can be interpreted as a Heideggerian form of *ziran*.

Heidegger's *ziranist* moment appears interconnected with both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. First, releasement is not about turning away and withdrawing into tranquility or serenity of mind, as in Stoic *ataraxia*. This does not, Heidegger notes around 1942/43 during a period of heightened engagement with the *Daodejing*, let things approach and become near in silence (GA 97: 33). It is not about the silencing enacted by the self but hearing into the silent: "the silence of nature and the simplicity of all things" (GA 97: 23). Nature is heard not in acting, willing, and anti-willing that are necessarily obstructions. It is in inaction (*Nicht-Handeln*), which is not a mere doing nothing (*Nichts-tun*), that the playful open space of the clearing of being is prepared (GA 97: 23).

Second, in the same reflections, Heidegger makes a statement related to his other discussions related to Wilhelm's translation of the *Zhuangzi*: "the most necessary is the unnecessary and the useful is the necessary" (GA 97: 30). The unnecessariness or uselessness of the thing is a moment of its freedom and self-naturing in the *Zhuangzi* as the translations of Buber and Wilhelm accentuate. Releasement is articulated in the 1940s in ways that intersect with thought-images and moments from the *Zhuangzi*. It is as a worldly attunement and comportment of free receptivity and

responsiveness to and the safeguarding of things and world in their own autopoietic self-happening.<sup>7</sup>

This is not all. A number of Heidegger's reflections during this period mirror in significant ways the emptying of the heart-mind, the letting release, the resonant-responsiveness, the usefulness of the uselessness, the shifting of perspectives toward the thing's own way of being, freely and easily becoming oneself in sojourning and wandering, and the nourishing of the life of the myriad things expressed in the *Zhuangzi* editions of Buber and Wilhelm that were familiar reading to Heidegger since the Weimar Republic.

#### 4 Heidegger's *Country Path Conversations*

There are three dialogues in *Country Path Conversations*: "A Three-way Conversation on a Country Path between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Guide (*Weisen*)"; "The Teacher Meets the Tower Warden at the Door to the Tower Stairway"; "Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and an Older Man." While the first dialogue raises issues and themes analogous to "The Uniqueness of the Poet" (1943) and "The Thing" (1950), the "Evening Conversation" is unique among Heidegger's works in significant ways and a number of its themes are not addressed again.

It is already atypical in referring to the *Zhuangzi* instead of the more typically featured *Laozi* text. It is portrayed as taking place in a Soviet prisoner of war camp in the vast Siberian forests, between a younger captured German soldier and an older one. It is geopolitical in that it is dated May 7, 1945, the date of the unconditional capitulation of Nazi Germany, and engages in a dialogical reflection on the "German disaster" and not only the crisis of modernity, as is more typical of Heidegger's later discourse, even while it relates the disaster that has befallen the German people to a fundamental loss of being itself.

The conversation commences with the younger soldier encountering "what is healing" (*das Heilsame*), which Heidegger further elucidates in the "Letter on Humanism" three years later.<sup>8</sup> He encounters it in the vast expansiveness, a thought-image of the cosmos in the earlier conversation yet not a symbol, of the forest that enwraps the unwholesomeness of the camp while remaining untouchable within these confines (GA 77: 206; Heidegger 2010: 133). In contrast to his discourse of the mid-1930s, this encounter is explicitly described as not possibly deriving from

<sup>7</sup>On the development and significance of Heidegger's discourse of willing, not-willing, and *Gelassenheit*, see Davis 2007.

<sup>8</sup>The "Letter on Humanism" provides a reflection on action and the problematic of activism that can be related to Daoist themes, as explored in Nelson 2004: 65–74; Nelson 2020. The letter questions the nature of the human in relation to nature and the inhuman that is also operative across the *Zhuangzi*. On humanism and anti-humanism in the *Zhuangzi*, see Nelson 2014: 723–739; Perkins 2010: 118–136; and Wenning 2014: 93–111.



a choice, decision, or the assertion of the will. It occurs through being “let into [*eingelassen*] what heals,” “of the letting of its happening [*Veranlassung*]” (GA 77: 206; Heidegger 2010: 133). This dialogue is shaped by its play on the various senses of letting, allowing, and releasing related to the stem-word “*lassen*” and the complexities of healing, possibly evoking early Daoist responsive attunement and nurturing things in a context of devastation in which nothing is allowed to grow and be healed.

How then does the mystery of this letting occur? How do we think such letting in a context of injury and harm? The conversation is haunted by the specter of the unwholesome as that which cannot heal (*das Unheilsame*), a question taken up in the 1948 diagnosis of the pathologies of modernity in the “Letter on Humanism.” and the incapacity of deep wounds to heal: “And what is not all wounded and torn apart in us?—us, for whom a blinded leading-astray of our own people is too deplorable to permit wasting a complaint on, despite the devastation that covers our native soil and its helplessly perplexed [*ratlose*] humans.” This situation of covering and perplexity leading to devastation is depicted by the older man in relation to the phenomenon of evil. Evil is interpreted in reference to fury and malice: the “devastation of the earth and the annihilation of the human essence that goes with it are somehow evil [*das Böse*]” (GA 77: 207–208; Heidegger 2010: 134).

The conversation continues by positioning the desolation and desertification of National Socialism and the Second World War in relation to a more “originary devastation” of earth and humanity. The older man states: “Devastation [*Verwüstung*] means for us, after all, that everything—the world, the human, and the earth—will be transformed into a desert [*Wüste*]” (GA 77: 211; Heidegger 2010: 135). This desolation is “of the earth and of human existence” (GA 77: 212; Heidegger 2010: 136). It has left a wasteland behind, a desert in which: “the deserted [*verlassene*] expanse of the abandonment [*Verlassenheit*] of all life” (GA 77: 212; Heidegger 2010: 137). Heidegger defined the desert in a later letter as “the area where there is no growth” and “nothing is let grown” (GA 16: 563). As the *Zhuangzi* appears to critique the calculative and purposive nurturing of life for its free self-nourishing, Heidegger depicts the modern condition as one where growing life is replaced and obstructed by planning and calculation.<sup>9</sup>

What of the political context of this conversation about devastation and healing? Heidegger can be understood as “criticizing” National Socialism in this way in this and other works of this era. He does so, however, in the *Black Notebooks* not by itself on its own terms, or by appealing to standard criticisms, but rather by explaining it as part of a larger process that he controversially perceives to be expressed in Americanism, communism, and globalizing modernity itself, of which National Socialism is another flawed and failed instance.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>GA 16: 563. On the *Zhuangzi* and purposive and non-purposive nourishing life (*yangsheng*), see Nelson 2020: 24–48.

<sup>10</sup>On Heidegger’s early enthusiasm for, then increasingly ambivalent, and subsequently critical response toward National Socialism, which is evident in the *Country Path Conversations*, see Nelson 2017b: 77–88.

Given the devastation of the earth, and their own devastated essence, what then can these two useless imprisoned men do, and what can the German people do? In an extended conversation concerned with waiting, which echoes the emptied heart-mind waiting on things in the *Zhuangzi*, the interlocutors differentiate a waiting for “something” that is structured by anticipation and expectation (*auf etwas warten*, *Erwarten*) and a “pure waiting” (*reines Warten*), without anticipation and projection, in which one waits upon nothing (*das Nichts*).<sup>11</sup> This waiting on nothing cannot be an awaiting of the nothing, otherwise it could not be pure: it awaits and clings to neither being nor nothing but “waits on that which answers pure waiting,” the “echo of pure coming,” which evokes the fasting of the heart-mind as the awaiting of things in emptiness in the *Zhuangzi* (GA 77 227; Heidegger 2010: 140).

The received *Zhuangzi* text refers to waiting a number of times. There is no reason to wait and depend on other’s opinions or what will take place or be correct in the future. There is an awaiting of transformations and the movements of heavens. There is the waiting for the true or genuine person (*zhenren* 真人) and genuine knowing (*zhenzhi* 真知) in the first section of *Zhuangzi* chapter six. In a crucial passage, vital energy is depicted as “an emptiness, a waiting for the presence of beings. The way alone is what gathers in this emptiness. And it is this emptiness that is the fasting of the mind.”<sup>12</sup> There is the waiting of the heart-mind in emptiness and this waiting is a letting-gathering in emptiness.

Waiting is described by Heidegger in this 1945 conversation as a “letting come,” or letting arrive, and a “safeguarding” (evoking Daoist nurturing and preserving) that is not an expectation concerning a predicted or unpredicted future. It is instead, like *Zhuangzi*’s empty heart-mind, a waiting that empties the mind of any expectation of what is to come. Without expectation and protections, it is things that gather. Emptiness that gathers is to this extent the opposite of nihilistic annihilation that destroys things and obscures world with devastating technologies of war and the paradigm of all-pervasive pragmatic usefulness. It is at this moment of the conversation that *Zhuangzian* themes begin to emerge that will be sealed by the quotation in the conclusion.

The form of letting Heidegger has in mind appears in the form of the useless and unnecessary. It is activity and willing that appears as the useful and necessary. Here there is an interpretive reversal against the instrumentalist paradigm that presupposes and invokes Wilhelm’s translation of the *Zhuangzi*: “Only one who has learned to know the necessity of the unnecessary...” and “the unnecessary remains at all times the most necessary of all” (GA 77: 220; Heidegger 2010: 143).

<sup>11</sup> GA 77: 227; Heidegger 2010: 140. On waiting without expectation and will, and the releasement of the worlding of world and pure arrival, see: GA 97: 183.

<sup>12</sup> This is Ziporyn’s translation of: “若一志，無聽之以耳，而聽之以心；無聽之以心，而聽之以氣。聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者心齋也。” (Guo 1961: 147).

## 5 Heidegger's Dependence on Wilhelm's *Zhuangzi*

The denial of the *Zhuangzi*'s impact on Heidegger's thinking would be easier to make if Heidegger's language did not rely on idiosyncrasies in Wilhelm's translations. Wilhelm was a prolific translator. His editions of the Chinese classics were the primary means for German readers of Heidegger's generation to access Chinese texts, including classical and religious Daoist sources. In addition to his translations of the *Yijing* and a number of Confucian classics, Wilhelm translated into German the *Liezi* 列子 and *The Secret* [or *Mystery*] of the *Golden Flower* (*Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi* 太乙金華宗旨), a work of inner alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) meditative techniques, and includes an introduction written by his friend Carl G. Jung.<sup>13</sup>

Despite Wilhelm's prolific quantity of translations and his sinological expertise and authority, Heidegger explicitly addresses solely the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* texts and does not necessarily follow Wilhelm's translations and commentaries even as he is at points reacting to them. For instance, Wilhelm rendered the title of his 1911 *Daodejing* translation as *The Book of the Old Master on Sense and Life* (*Das Buch des alten Meisters vom Sinn und Leben*) (Wilhelm 1911). Heidegger does not employ Wilhelm's life-philosophical translations of *dao* as sense or meaning (*Sinn*) and *de* 德 as life (*Leben*) or life-force (*Lebenskraft*). Nor would Heidegger accept the Kantian and life-philosophical conceptual registers that Wilhelm deploys to introduce the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* to German speaking audiences. Wilhelm would describe the *Zhuangzi*, as a Chinese critique of pure reason, contending that the paradoxes of chapter two constituted a critique of reason that refuted skepticism for the sake of life's unity.<sup>14</sup> According to Guo Xiang's commentary, *Zhuangzi*'s equalizing oneness signifies that each thing can be itself in its own way following its own nature.

Relying on a prevalent system of classification of forms of philosophy during this period between naturalism, subjective idealism, and objective idealism, Wilhelm categorized *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy as a type of objective idealism that shared family resemblances with the discourses of Heraclitus and Spinoza, and promoted a *Gelassenheit* not afflicted by life's suffering (Wilhelm 1912: xiii, xxi, 8; ix, 116). The *Zhuangzi*'s objective idealism accordingly offers an impersonal objective overview of the whole of existence in which all is equalized from the perspective of eternity (Wilhelm 1912: xiii). The balancing between heaven and earth is described as a condition that is still, tasteless, released, concentrated, empty, and not fixed to being and acting (Wilhelm 1912: 116).

It is worth noting once more that prior to Heidegger, in works that he was familiar with at least in part, Wilhelm and Buber utilized the words *Gelassenheit* (as a comportment of letting) and *lassen* (to let) in translating and interpreting early Daoism. Buber could describe the I/thou relationship to God in his 1923 work *I and*

<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm 1921, and Wilhelm 1948. Jung credits Wilhelm as a great inspiration in his life and work in his "Richard Wilhelm: In Memoriam" in Jung 1966: 53–62.

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm 1912: 9; also compare Nelson 2017: 67.

*Thou (Ich und Du)*—in Daoist terms of a non-indifferent and non-attached responsiveness to things—as having a “*Gelassenheit* to all things and a sensibility that helps them” (“die Gelassenheit zu allen Dingen und die Berührung, die ihnen hilft”).<sup>15</sup> “Helping things” is Buber’s construal of Daoist nourishing things. It is taken up into the language of “safeguarding” and “healing” in Heidegger.

There are significant differences between Wilhelm and Heidegger. Wilhelm categorizes Zhuangzi’s Daoism as a form of active immanent mysticism that embraces and unites with rather than flees from life and its forces. Heidegger consistently rejected the concept of mysticism even as some elements of his thinking, precisely those that have been examined in relation to Meister Eckhart and Daoism, are identified by various interpreters with modern Occidental categories such as pantheism and mysticism.

Heidegger expressed skepticism concerning such categorizations and the world-view philosophies that promoted them. Wilhelm, by contrast, depicts the fundamental thought of the *Zhuangzi* to be “sovereign freedom,” in which the genuine person is at one with life in an active and this-worldly form of mysticism in contrast to its passive and other-worldly forms.<sup>16</sup> Zhuangzi is a this-worldly mystic in Wilhelm’s portrayal who uplifts by embracing life rather than sinking away from it in self-absorption. This indicates, as Klages claimed in 1929 in response to Nietzsche’s critique of the renunciation of the will as necessarily entailing ascetic world-denial, that the Daoist suspension of the self is world-affirming.<sup>17</sup>

There are significant departures between how Heidegger and Wilhelm construe basic Daoist words and concepts. Despite the strong intellectual differences between Wilhelm and Heidegger, their interpretations are entwined in Heidegger’s reliance on Wilhelm’s translations. Heidegger’s quasi-Daoist ways of speaking draw on Wilhelm’s more poetic. It is therefore worthwhile to trace Wilhelm’s uses of usefulness and the “necessity of the unnecessary” to consider why Heidegger adopted his translation in this case.

In the 1945 “Evening Conversation,” Heidegger does not refer here to Wilhelm’s translation of *wuyong zhiyong* 無用之用 from the concluding passage of chapter four (*Renjian shi* 人間世 that Wilhelm translates as “In der Menschenwelt” / “In the Human World”) in the Inner Chapters.<sup>18</sup> Heidegger does not refer in this context to

<sup>15</sup> Buber 1962: 131. I show ways in which Buber’s *I and Thou* is informed by his earlier interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* in Nelson 2017: 109–129. On this Daoist dimension of Buber’s classic work, see Wirth 2020: 121–134.

<sup>16</sup> Wilhelm describes how the *Zhuangzi* conveys the practical consequences of a “sovereign freedom” that is rooted beyond the entangling affairs of the world in the one. This leisurely unforced independence is free from every conditioning and limiting purpose, will, and striving (Wilhelm 1912: xiv).

<sup>17</sup> Klages 1981: 342, 496. More recently, a number of works have emphasized the world-affirmative moment in the *Zhuangzi* in relation to Nietzsche such as Froese 2006.

<sup>18</sup> In Wilhelm’s edition, this is translated: “Der Baum auf dem Berge beraubt sich selbst; das Öl in der Lampe verzehrt sich selbst. Der Zimtbaum ist eßbar, drum wird er gefällt; der Lackbaum ist nützlich, drum wird er zerspellt. Jedermann weiß, wie nützlich es ist, nützlich zu sein, und niemand weiß, wie nützlich es ist, nutzlos zu sein” (Wilhelm 1912: 36). The Chinese text states: “山

the concluding section of chapter one that he cites and discusses at length in the 1962 Comburg lecture “Transmitted Language and Technical Language” (“Überlieferte Sprache und Technische Sprache”), a discussion that connects once again usefulness and uselessness to questions concerning language and things in the epoch of the technological world-picture that obstructs the forms of responsiveness and saying illustrated in the thought-images of the *Zhuangzi*.

The “Evening Conversation” refers to a different passage from Wilhelm’s *Zhuangzi*. “Die Notwendigkeit des Unnötigen” is Wilhelm’s title for the dialogue between Zhuangzi and his skeptical sophist friend Huizi in chapter twenty-six (*Waiwu* 外物, “Aussendinge” or “External Things”) of the Miscellaneous Chapters.<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm’s expression “the necessity of the unnecessary” (“die Notwendigkeit des Unnötigen”), adopted by Heidegger, is a rendition of one possible meaning of the phrase in contrast to the more typically used terms of usefulness and uselessness. This dialogue in Wilhelm’s rendition is cited in the conclusion of Heidegger’s “Evening Conversation” without naming these two early Chinese philosophers. Bret Davis’s translation into English reads:

The one said: “You are talking about the unnecessary.”

The other said: “A person must first have recognized the unnecessary before one can talk with him about the necessary. The earth is wide and large, and yet, in order to stand, the human needs only enough space to be able to put his foot down. But if directly next to his foot a crevice were to open up that dropped down into the underworld, then would the space where he stands still be of use to him?”

The one said: “It would be of no more use to him.”

The other said: “From this the necessity of the unnecessary is clearly apparent” (GA 77: 239–240; Heidegger 2010: 156).

It has been argued that Wilhelm’s translation of *yong* as necessity is infelicitous. Even if this assessment is accepted, as it indicates one possible sense of this idea given Wilhelm’s hermeneutical situation, one could well ask what is the specific difference between the first expression from chapter four (*wuyong zhi yong* 無用之用) and the second from chapter twenty-six (*wuyong zhi wei yong* 無用之為用) and their contexts that led Wilhelm to translate one in terms of usefulness of uselessness and the other in terms of the necessity of the unnecessary? Why did Wilhelm mark a difference between these two expressions when most German and English

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木自寇也，膏火自煎也，桂可食，故伐之；漆可用，故割之。人皆知有用之用，而莫知無用之用也。” (Guo 1961: 186).

<sup>19</sup>Wilhelm’s translation reads: “Hui Dsi sprach zu Dschuang Dsi: ‘Ihr redet von Unnötigem.’ Dschuang Dsi sprach: ‘Erst muß einer das Unnötige erkennen, ehe man mit ihm vom Nötigen reden kann. Die Erde ist ja weit und groß, und doch braucht der Mensch, um zu stehen, nur soviel Platz, daß er seinen Fuß darauf setzen kann. Wenn aber unmittelbar neben dem Fuß ein Riß entstände bis hinab zu der Unterwelt, wäre ihm dann der Platz, worauf er steht, noch zu etwas nütze?’ ‘Hui Dsi sprach: ‘Er wäre ihm nichts mehr nütze.’ Dschuang Dsi sprach: ‘Daraus ergibt sich klar die Notwendigkeit des Unnötigen’” (Wilhelm 1912: 203–204). The received Chinese text states: “惠子謂莊子曰：子言無用。莊子曰：知無用而始可與言用矣。夫地非不廣且大也，人之所用容足耳。然則廁足而墊之致黃泉，人尚有用乎？惠子曰：無用。莊子曰：然則無用之為用也亦明矣。” (Guo 1961: 936).

translations do not? Both expressions are typically interpreted as the usefulness of the useless, while Wilhelm and Heidegger mark a difference and deploy both use and necessity. It still leaves the question of why Heidegger made the second expression the leitmotif of the “Evening Conversation”?

## 6 Waiting and Letting

The unnecessary is explicitly juxtaposed with the instrumental and technical character of ratio and modern rationality in this text as well as with the occidental essence of thinking that does not allow itself to wait or let (GA 77: 220; Heidegger 2010: 143). Again, raising a theme that taken up in the “Letter on Humanism” that engages in a reflection on “action” and its adequacy as a measure of the human, this sense of ratio, and of the human being as the rational animal, is inadequate to the human essence as the being that can wait and be attentive and responsive in that to which they belong.

In the patience of waiting, Heidegger remarked, we (and we should consider who this “we” is) are the inlet or letting in (*Einlaß*) for that which is coming: “We are in such a manner as though we were to first come to ourselves, in letting in [*einlassend*] the coming, as those who are themselves only by abandoning themselves—this, however, by means of waiting toward [*entgegenwarten*] the coming” (GA 77: 227; Heidegger 2010: 147). Playing on the German word for the present, *Gegenwart*, he interprets the word according to its two components: as a “‘present’ elucidated as ‘waiting-toward’ (*gegen-warten*)” (GA 77: 227; Heidegger 2010: 147). The genuine present transpires as a pure “waiting” (*warten*) toward (*gegen*, which can mean “in the direction of” or “against”) that which is to come. This waiting waits insofar as it is unrestricted by anticipations and expectations such as of what is deemed necessary and useful.

What does patient waiting signify in this setting? Is this the emptied heart-mind that awaits things in emptiness of the *Zhuangzi*? Waiting is delineated elsewhere in Heidegger as essentially a letting, which is not a product of willing and acting, an emptiness and silence in which the echo is heard (GA 81: 170). In waiting, in the third of the *Country Path Conversations*, we “let ourselves into, namely into that in which we belong”; namely, “by letting things rest in their own repose,” which occurs in an emptiness that cannot be filled (GA 77: 229; Heidegger 2010: 149). This letting things be themselves in their releasement (*Gelassenheit*) occurs through emptiness and signifies an anarchic freedom: “Freedom rests in being able to let [*Lassenkönnen*], not in ordering and dominating” (GA 77: 230; Heidegger 2010: 149). Abandoning restrictive ways of controlling and ordering things and allowing them to pursue their own course is a fundamentally Zhuangzian point that other contemporary readers construed along anarchistic and libertarian lines. Heidegger



adopts such freedom to his own conception of freedom as a return to one's own self-essencing: freedom to oneself and the open ground.<sup>20</sup>

It has been argued that Heidegger's sense of letting here might have inspirational sources in Meister Eckhart, Böhme, and Schelling without any need to mention Laozi or Zhuangzi. However, we might recall Wilhelm's identification of Zhuangzi with a sovereign freedom and *Gelassenheit* immanently amidst life. Furthermore, it is Heidegger himself in this conversation who evokes and employs Daoist thought-images throughout this text.

Heidegger's direct and indirect references prompts the question of the extent to which he appropriated a range of Daoist concepts from the editions of Buber and Wilhelm such as *wuwei* (which is linked with letting and waiting in Chinese and German sources), *ziran* 自然 (as a non-instrumentalized naturalness happening in and for itself), and the freedom and releasement of things (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊). Does it justify speaking of a "Daoist turn" in Heidegger or more modestly of transformative Lao-Zhuang Daoist traces and spurs that is marked, for instance, in the change of tone and semantic content between the 1939–1941 (GA 96) and the 1942–1948 (GA 97) "Black Notebooks"? The language of waiting, letting, and *Gelassenheit* barely appears in the former text that is entangled in questions of will, power, conflict, and geopolitics. It plays an increasingly significant role in the latter, as the will becomes the counter-image rather than the expression and work of *phusis*, indicating an adjustment in his thinking that correlates his heightened attention to the texts attributed to Laozi and Zhuangzi.

## 7 The Unnecessary and an Unnecessary Useless People

It is striking that Heidegger has his two interlocutors intriguingly rejected the idea of nations and nationalisms in the "Evening Conversation," including what he deems its internationalized form. In the context of rejecting nationalism, the concluding pages articulate how the German people, a "useless" "unnecessary" people, must learn the necessity of the unnecessary and become a people of pure waiting, letting and releasing things precisely in order to release themselves. Human letting is only possible because of being's letting be of things: "We learn letting go only in the letting be of being" (GA 97: 153). In the early Daoist context, *ziran* as autopoietic self-naturing is the condition of *wuwei* as non-assertive responsive attunement (Nelson 2020).

Heidegger's deployment of *Gelassenheit* reverberates with the word's linguistic heritage from Eckhart through Schelling.<sup>21</sup> Still, Heidegger states that his thinking releasement is not akin to Eckhart's turning away from the sinful will to the divine

<sup>20</sup> See GA 96: 32, 91, 101, 162. In GA 97, this way of speaking is more closely interconnected with letting and concepts familiar from early *ziranist* Daoism.

<sup>21</sup> On the development and significance of *Gelassenheit* in Heidegger, see Davis 2007.



will (GA 77: 109; Heidegger 2010: 70). His releasement does not concern, as Böhme portrays the worldly detachment of *Gelassenheit*, suspending the sinful selfness (*Selbstheit*) and temptations of earthly temporal things that hinder the soul's nearness to the eternal and divine (Böhme 1732: 50, 123). This difference intersects with the *Zhuangzi* in which there is no suspension of the self's will for a divine will nor the condemnation of creatures as sinful and evil (Böhme 1732: 115). The thing is dependent on its own self-generative being (*ziran*) rather than an ontotheology of divine creation. The unfettered self can transition through limiting perspectives and shift with the myriad things following their own self-naturing.

Heidegger's usage of letting releasement is conceived much more along the lines of the German reception of the *Zhuangzi* and its sense of liberation as precisely being in and with the world and nourishing, healing, and safe-guarding the life of things. It is in this sense an *ethos* instead of a mystical state. "Nourishing life" (*yangsheng* 養生) is a concept from the *Zhuangzi* that can be interpreted in relation to cultivating and healing life from what afflicts it, which resonates in Heidegger's third *Country Path Conversation* on the unwholesome and the letting and waiting that heals and nurtures.<sup>22</sup> Letting releases both things and humans, and it is that which heals (*das Heilsame*). In this passage, healing is called for in response to an affliction: it is a way for a people that had been misled by "false leaders," with their destructive aims justified as "necessary," and which is now confronted by its own uselessness and unnecessary.

Heidegger accordingly has reasons for speaking of the necessity of the unnecessary. First, it appears that for Heidegger, the useful is identifiable with the necessary according to the instrumental paradigm that equates the two, and which is challenged by the unnecessary that promises a different way of dwelling and modality of being. Secondly, expressions such as *das Notwendige* and *die Notwendigkeit* do not signify the necessary as that which must be the case or the compulsion of logical implication, although it does signify a fateful compulsion (GA 77: 237–238).

The necessary is in Heidegger's reflections rather what is urgent and needful (*nötig*) to respond to distress in a situation of need and emergency (*Not*). It is the unnecessary that responds to this situation of needfulness, in which "learning to know the need [*Not*] in which everywhere the unnecessary [*das Unnötige*] must still persevere" (GA 77: 237; Heidegger 2010: 155). It would be questionable to project Heidegger's elucidation of necessity onto Wilhelm's initial translation. Still, it appears that his translation also presupposes a wider field of meanings for "necessity" (that is, the Chinese word *yong* and the German word *Notwendigkeit*) than a form of logical compulsion.

Heidegger's "Evening Conversation" ends with the confirmation of its Zhuangzian context by explicitly quoting chapter twenty-six of the *Zhuangzi* in which Huizi and Zhuangzi debate the meanings of the necessary and unnecessary (useful and useless), a conversation that has reverberated throughout the

<sup>22</sup> On the significance of "nourishing life" in the *Zhuangzi* and nourishing creation in Buber, one of Heidegger's sources for his understanding of the *Zhuangzi*, see Chap. 4 of Nelson 2017.

conversation of the old and young men imprisoned in a Soviet prisoner of war camp. It is evident in this conversation that Heidegger did not appropriate Daoism to legitimate or excuse National Socialism, but rather to confront what he now considered its destructive malice that has left devastation and ruins in its wake.

Heidegger's delimited confrontation with the destructiveness of National Socialism, and his own initial complicity, does take place here and in other postwar reflections, such as in the so-called "Black Notebooks" in GA 98. To briefly simplify a complex issue, these criticisms refer to the history of being and technological modernity. They do not occur in a way that embraces the anarchic autopoietic or ziranist self-organizing tendencies of some forms of Daoist political discourse or endorses democracy and an open public sphere and civil society as Arendt, Adorno, Habermas, Levinas, and many others have critically outlined since the 1940s.

## 8 Uselessness and the Very Sense of Things

Heidegger's ongoing attentiveness to the *Zhuangzi* is shown in another lecture that addresses topics at the heart of his later philosophy. Heidegger returned to the *Zhuangzi* and the problematic of usefulness and uselessness in a lecture given on July 18, 1962 on "Transmitted Language and Technical Language." In this discussion of learning, the limits of language, and the appropriate words for things, Heidegger quotes at length in this lecture Wilhelm's translation of "The Useless Tree" (*Der unnütze Baum*) containing the conversation between Zhuangzi and Huizi that concludes chapter one of the *Zhuangzi*. Heidegger cited the entirety of Wilhelm's translation of the passage included with the Chinese text in the endnote.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm's translation quoted by Heidegger: "Hui Dsi redete zu Dschuang Dsi und sprach: 'Ich habe einen großen Baum. Die Leute nennen ihn Götterbaum. Der hat einen Stamm so knorrig und verwachsen, daß man ihn nicht nach der Richtschnur zersägen kann. Seine Zweige sind so krumm und gewunden, daß man sie nicht nach Zirkel und Winkelmaß verarbeiten kann. Da steht er am Weg, aber kein Zimmermann sieht ihn an. So sind Eure Worte, o Herr, groß und unbrauchbar, und alle wenden sich einmütig von ihnen ab.' Dschuang Dsi sprach: 'Habt Ihr noch nie einen Marder gesehen, der geduckten Leibes lauert und wartet, ob etwas vorüber kommt? Hin und her springt er über die Balken und scheut sich nicht vor hohem Sprunge, bis er einmal in eine Falle gerät oder in einer Schlinge zugrunde geht. Nun gibt es aber auch den Grunzochsen. Der ist groß wie eine Gewitterwolke; mächtig steht er da. Aber Mäuse fangen kann er freilich nicht. Nun habt Ihr so einen großen Baum und bedauert, daß er zu nichts nütze ist. Warum pflanzt Ihr ihn nicht auf eine öde Heide oder auf ein weites leeres Feld? Da könntet Ihr untätig in seiner Nähe umherstreifen und in Muße unter seinen Zweigen schlafen. Nicht Beil noch Axt bereitet ihm ein vorzeitiges Ende, und niemand kann ihm schaden. Daß etwas keinen Nutzen hat: was braucht man sich darüber zu bekümmern!'" (Wilhelm 1912: 7; Heidegger 1989: 8). The Chinese text reads: "惠子謂莊子曰:「吾有大樹,人謂之樗。其大本擁腫而不中繩墨,其小枝卷曲而不中規矩,立之塗,匠者不顧。今子之言,大而無用,眾所同去也。莊子曰:子獨不見狸狌乎?卑身而伏,以候敖者;東西跳梁,不避高下;中於機辟,死於罔罟。今夫斄牛,其大若垂天之雲。此能為大矣,而不能執鼠。今子有大樹,患其無用,何不樹之於無何有之鄉,廣莫之野,彷徨乎無為其側,逍遙乎寢臥其下?不夭斤斧,物無害者,無所可用,安所困苦哉!'" (Guo 1961: 39–40).

Why might have Heidegger concentrated his attention on this passage? Given the criticisms his philosophy of being received, Heidegger might well have identified with Huizi's accusation against Zhuangzi of using big, fantastic, and useless words, and responding with indications transgressing the limits of the useful. Heidegger appeals to the *Zhuangzi*, as mediated by Wilhelm's translation, to diagnose the modern technological epoch and ponder possibilities of reawakening a sense of speaking with and encountering things through a form of meditative reflection or thinking (*Besinnung*) that involves awakening a sense for the useless ("den Sinn wecken für das Nutzlose") (Heidegger 1989: 6). Heidegger describes this sense of the useless as the most necessary and needful (*das Nötigste*) for encountering "the sense of things" (*der Sinn der Dinge*) and as constituting the very sense and usefulness of the useful (*das Nützliche*) (Heidegger 1989: 7).

Huizi and Zhuangzi's conversations about uselessness reveal in Heidegger's portrayal the precariousness of the inversion that makes the useful the measure of usefulness, as it is under the dominion of the modern technological world-picture. This imposition of the measure of the useful misses the determining power of the useless, which is not made and out of which nothing can be made, as it is "the sense of things" disclosing themselves (Heidegger 1989: 6).

Heidegger deploys this Zhuangzian inspired conception of the useless sense of things, correlating uselessness (*wuyong*) with self-soness (*ziran*, inadequately translated into English as "nature"), to counter the instrumentalist reduction of things to technique and a pedagogy aiming at the reduction of language to information, the mastery and calculation of things as useful, and the compulsion of achieving practical results. Learning is, however, not imposing a measure on those who learn and their objects of study. It is attending to the unspoken measure manifesting in things themselves.

Heidegger construes learning along the lines of *wuwei* as a non-coercive "letting be learned" (*lernenlassen*). This letting be learned emerges through "transmitted language" that is too often dismissed as merely natural pre-scientific ways of speaking. Nonetheless, transmitted language is the language of everyday life and encountering and dwelling with others and things. To lose this contact and relationship with things is to lose what it is to be essentially human. The "essentially human" does not signify for Heidegger the anthropocentric and humanistic separation of the human from the world, which he interrogated in the semi-Daoistic inflected "Letter on Humanism." It indicates a free immanent dwelling with and in the midst of things that allows them their own sense.

A non-technically reduced and impoverished language—as illustrated in poetic saying and thinking, which Laozi and Zhuangzi express—happens as spoken and unspoken saying, and saying is a showing and letting-appear of what is present and absent, of reality in the widest sense ("das Sagen als das Zeigen und Erscheinenlassen des Anwesenden und Abwesenden, der Wirklichkeit im weitesten Sinne") (Heidegger 1989: 25). Such saying does not obscure things and the world, as technical language does in its pursuit of the domination of nature and the mastery of things as merely "useful" and "useless."

Saying remains open to encountering what is unsaid and unsayable: “the nearness of the unspoken and unspeakable” (“die Nähe des Ungesprochenen und des Unaussprechlichen bringt”) (Heidegger 1989: 28). This wording reformulates Heidegger’s remark on Laozi in *On the Way to Language*: “the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful saying conceals itself in the word ‘way,’ *dao*, if only we will let these names return to what they leave unspoken, if only we are capable of this, to allow them to do so” (GA 12: 187; Heidegger 2009: 92). His reflection poses the question whether such a sense of mystery (which he repeatedly linked with Daoist *xuan*) can be awakened in the midst of human errancy. Heidegger’s refusal of pragmatist and technocratic instrumentalist forms of reductive and impoverishing ways of speaking and thinking in this short essay explicitly draws on the *Zhuangzi*, as we have seen, and remains pertinent in the current situation of ecological devastation.

## 9 Conclusion

The *Zhuangzi* plays an intriguing role in Heidegger’s thinking in “Transmitted Language and Technological Language”, even if it is insufficient to speak only of a Daoist turn to describe Heidegger’s later thinking, as it introduces the thematic of uselessness and the sense of things that steps beyond Heidegger’s German sources such as Eckhart, Schelling, and Hölderlin.<sup>24</sup> The intrinsic autopoietic “self-soing” sense of things showing themselves from themselves are phenomenological and Zhuangzian insights. In addition, for comparative and intercultural philosophers of contemporary thought, there are partial family resemblances between tendencies in both discourses, and Heidegger has a significant role both in the contemporary European and East Asian philosophical reception of Lao-Zhuang ziranist discourses.

Heidegger is concerned in this context with a learning that undoes linguistic and conceptual fixations and allows for encountering things themselves in their uselessness and their own significance. The *Zhuangzi* and Heidegger are not merely critics of the reification of language, but of the anthropocentric and instrumental construction and experience of the world that Heidegger analyzed as enframing (*Gestell*) and contrasts with safeguarding and nourishing.<sup>25</sup> Heidegger could accordingly uncover in this ancient text teachings that resonated with his own thinking that endeavored to unfix the modern technological framework for the sake of more freely dwelling in the thick of things and abiding amidst the world. This interpretation remains a salutary reminder and critical model in the ecologically troubled Anthropocene,

<sup>24</sup> For a stronger portrayal of the argument that Heidegger had a Daoist turn, see Xia 2017.

<sup>25</sup> The *Zhuangzi* and Heidegger contest experiential reification and linguistic fixation through a variety of destructuring strategies, such as paradoxes and goblet words in the *Zhuangzi*, and paradoxical and poetic speaking in Heidegger. On destructuring linguistic reification in Heidegger, see Rorty 1993: 337–357.

even as it should also not be fixated nor deployed in a biocentrism that neglects confronting intrahuman injustices.

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# Chapter 34

## Zhuangzi's Notion of the True Master and Wittgenstein's Grammatical Investigation



Leo K. C. Cheung

### 1 Introduction

I argue that there is the notion of the True Master 真宰 in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and that the True Master is a transcendental subject conferring the first person perspective onto, and influencing her engagement in, the grand process of the transformation of all things; and yet the True Master herself does not transform. I then employ Ludwig Wittgenstein's method of grammatical investigation to clarify Zhuangzi's notion of the True Master. A result of the investigation is that no ordinary words appropriately used in ordinary sentential contexts can be used to refer to the True Master. The notion of the True Master is therefore unintelligible, or yet to be made intelligible. I also explain how, probably, Zhuangzi is held captive by a certain picture such that he mistakenly adopts the notion of the True Master and takes it to be something intelligible.

### 2 The True Master

Besides attempting to make all things and discussions equal, in the chapter "Discussion on making all things equal 齊物論" of the "Inner Chapters 內篇" of the *Zhuangzi*, the author, or Zhuangzi,<sup>1</sup> tries to argue for the existence of the "True Master 真宰," or the "True Lord 真君:"

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<sup>1</sup>It is commonly understood that the "Inner Chapters" of the *Zhuangzi* was probably written by a single author, while the "Outer Chapters," the "Miscellaneous Chapters" and the chapter "The

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...Let it be! Let it be! [It is enough that] morning and evening we have them, and they are the means by which we live. Without them we would not exist; without us they would have nothing to take hold of. This comes close to the matter. But I do not know what makes them the way they are. *It would seem as though they have some True Master 真宰, and yet I find no trace of him. He can act - that is certain. Yet I cannot see his form. He has identity but no form.*

The hundred joints, the nine openings, the six organs, all come together and exist here [as my body]. But which part should I feel closest to? I should delight in all parts, you say? But there must be one I ought to favor more. If not, are they all of them mere servants? But if they are all servants, then how can they keep order among themselves? Or do they take turns being lord and servant? It would seem as though there must be some *True Lord 真君* among them. But whether I succeed in discovering his identity or not, it neither adds to nor detracts from his Truth. (Watson 2013: 8–9; emphasis mine.)

The True Master, or the True Lord, is therefore the subject, or, the agent, who controls, or governs, one's action, sensation, passion and emotion. Even though the True Master can act on the world, or exercise one's sense-perceptual faculties, with passion and emotion, one cannot see, comprehend or experience her own True Master, because it does not have a form. The True Master is formless, and yet it still has its identity.

The True Master is already mentioned by the indexical “吾 (I)” at the beginning of the chapter “Discussion on making all things equal:”

Ziqi of South Wall sat leaning on his armrest, staring up at the sky and breathing—vacant and far away, as though he'd lost his companion. Yan Cheng Ziyao, who was standing by his side in attendance, said, “What is this? Can you really make the body like a withered tree and the mind like dead ashes? The man leaning on the armrest now is not the one who leaned on it before!”

Ziqi said, “You do well to ask the question. Yan. Now I have lost myself [今者吾喪我<sup>2</sup>]. Do you understand that?...” (Watson 2013: 7)

The sentence “I have lost myself” is the translation of the Chinese sentence “吾喪我.” The first character “吾” and the last character “我” both mean “I.” But it is clear from the passage that the latter refers to the body. It is also clear from the broader context in “Discussion on making all things equal” that the first “I,” or “吾,” means the True Master. This point will be further substantiated in the discussions below.

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World” were written by different authors. I suspect that the “Inner Chapters,” and even each of them, were not composed by a single author. Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience, I will use “Zhuangzi” or “the author” to refer to the authors of the whole book. I think I am justified in doing so, because the passages in the *Zhuangzi* that I refer to here are specially chosen, and contain coherent views, such that the question whether they were written by a single author or not should have no relevance here.

<sup>2</sup>All the Chinese quotations of the *Zhuangzi* are from Huang (1974).

In philosophy, we talk about the first person perspective. In the two passages quoted above, Zhuangzi seems to be talking of the True Master as the subject who possesses the first person perspective. In fact, he holds a stronger view which entails that the True Master, as the agent possessing the first person perspective, is formless and yet has its own identity. I shall point out later that Zhuangzi holds that all things in the world (or the universe) come into being or nonbeing via transformation, and thence that all things in the world must have forms. It follows that the True Master has its identity, and yet it cannot be a thing, or things, in the world. This invites at least these two interesting questions: What is the ontological status of the True Master? What is the relationship holding between the True Master and the world (as the totality of all things or, rather, facts)?

In the story about Uncle Lack-Limb and Uncle Lame-gait in the chapter “Perfect Happiness 至樂” of the “Outer Chapters 外篇” of the *Zhuangzi*, Zhuangzi seems to try to bring out the point that, even though the True Master possesses the first person perspective, it cannot be identified with the “me” or “I” understood as my body, which changes (transforms) in the process of transformation (change):

Uncle Lack-Limb and Uncle Lame-Gait were seeing the sights at Dark Lord Hill and the wastes of Kunlun, the place where the Yellow Emperor rested. Suddenly a willow sprouted out of Uncle Lame-Gait's left elbow. He looked very startled and seemed to be annoyed.

“Do you resent it?” said Uncle Lack-Limb.

“No—what is there to resent?” said Uncle Lame-Gait. “To live is to borrow. And if we borrow to live, then life must be a pile of trash. Life and death are day and night. *You and I came to watch [觀] the process of change [化; transformation], and now change [化; transformation] has caught up with me. Why would I have anything to resent?*” (Watson 2013: 141; emphasis mine.)

The sentence “You and I came to watch the process of change, and now change has caught up with me” is the translation of the Chinese sentence “吾與子觀化而化及我.” The first word “I” and the last word “me” in the English sentence are the translations of “吾” and “我,” respectively. The “me (我)” mentioned in the above quotation is something transforming in the process of transformation, which is identifiable with the universe or the Heaven-and-Earth (天下). Since the “me” here transforms, it must have a form or must go through various forms in the grand process of transformation. Presumably, the author here would identify the “me” with the body, which of course cannot be the True Master. Given our previous discussions, the I as the “吾” is presumably the True Master. And the crucial view here is that the True Master, as the subject possessing the first person perspective, does not change with, nor resides in, the process of transformation.

The passage quoted above, however, only indirectly supports the view that the True Master does not change with, nor resides in, the process of transformation. For it is only entailed by the views in the passage. Nevertheless, the view is *positively* supported at least by the following passage from the chapter “Zeyang 則陽” of the “Miscellaneous Chapters 雜篇” of the *Zhuangzi*:

(The sovereign) Zan-hsiang was possessed of that central principle round which all things revolve, and by it he could follow them to their completion. His accompanying them had neither ending nor beginning, and was independent of impulse or time. *Daily he witnessed their changes, and himself underwent no change* [日與物化者，一不化者也]; and why should he not have rested in this? (Legge 1959: 557; emphasis mine.)<sup>3</sup>

The “he,” or Zan-hsiang, in this passage should mean one who knew the *dao*. He was always with transformations (changes), and yet he was invariant under all transformations. He himself underwent no transformation. The “he” here is not the body, or the “he” or “him,” which undergoes transformation. It is the True Master of the one who knows the *dao*. One may say, the True Master who knows the *dao* witnesses, and, as already mentioned in the passage from the chapter “Perfect Happiness” quoted above, can watch 觀, the process of the transformation of all things, and yet it is invariant under all transformations. Also, the True Master is *transcendental* in the sense that it governs, and influences, one’s engagement in the process of transformation, that is, in the world. (The precise meanings of the notions of governance, influence and engagement here will be explained later.)

Let us drawn a partial conclusion here. According to the *Zhuangzi*, the True Master is a formless subject possessing the first person perspective and thus governing one’s action, sensation, passion and emotion. It is also transcendental in governing and influencing one’s engagement in the process of transformation, and yet it itself is invariant under all transformations. The True Master never transforms and thus never resides in the world or the process of transformation.

However, in order to have a deeper understanding of the notion of the True Master in the *Zhuangzi*, we need to have an exposition of the views concerning the notions of the *dao*, transformation, watching and engaging in the process of transformation in the *Zhuangzi*. In what follows immediately, I shall try to offer such an exposition.

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<sup>3</sup>James Legge’s translation is used here, because I think it is better than Watson’s translation of the passage. Watson’s translation is as follows: “Mr. Jen-hsiang held on to the empty socket and followed along to completion. Joining with things, he knew no end, no beginning, no year, no season. And because he changed day by day with things, he was one with the man who never changes - so why should he ever try to stop doing this?” (Watson 2013: 217).

### 3 The *dao* of the *Zhuangzi*

The word “dao” in ancient China has at least two different meanings. The first meaning is that *dao* is the invariant, or what is invariant or unchanged, under all changes. Xunzi has given a very rigorous definition for this notion of *dao* in the Book 21 “Dispelling Blindness 解蔽篇” of the *Xunzi* 荀子:

夫道者，體常而盡變。<sup>4</sup>

John Knoblock translates it as follows:

But the Way [the *dao*] itself is constant in its form yet completely changeable. (Knoblock 1999: 679)

But, as I have argued elsewhere (Cheung 2001), this passage does not say that the *dao* is constant “in its form,” nor that the *dao* is completely changeable. I prefer to translate it as follows:

The *dao* is itself constant and yet governs all changes.

According to this understanding of the notion, the *dao* governs all (instances of) changes and yet it itself does not undergo any changes, that is, it is constant 常 or invariant under all changes.

According to the chapter “The World 天下” of the “Miscellaneous Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi*, Laozi expounds the notion of the *dao* by means of constant 常, emptiness 無 (*wu*; nonbeing) and being 有 (*yu*):

The Barrier Keeper Yin and Lao Tan heard of their views and delighted in them. They expounded them in terms of constant nonbeing and being, and headed their doctrine with the concept of the Great Unity [建之以常無有]. (Watson 2013: 294–5)

It is clear from the larger context of this passage that the view here was attributed to Laozi. Also, the fact that Laozi holds the particular view that the *dao* can be characterized by means of constant is supported textually by the *Daodejing* 道德經. For instance, these are two of those passages from Chapters 25 and 40 of the *Daodejing*, respectively:

I do not know its name; I give it the character: *dao*. If forced to give it a name, I shall call it Great. Now being great means functioning everywhere. Functioning everywhere means far-reaching. Being far-reaching means returning to the original point... (Chan 1963: 144; with minor alternations)

Reversion [反; *fan*] is the action of Tao [*dao*]. (Chan 1963: 173)

These passages show that Laozi holds that there is the *dao* as the invariant, or constant, under all changes, and that the *dao*, or the invariant, can be characterized in a very specific manner by means of the notions of being great 大, functioning everywhere 逝, being far-reaching 遠 and reversion 反.

<sup>4</sup>All the Chinese quotations of the *Xunzi* are from Wang (1995).

According to the chapter “The World 天下” of the *Zhuangzi*, Zhuangzi does not hold that there is the *dao* understood as the invariant under all changes:

Blank, boundless, and without form; transforming, changing, never constant... [變化無常]  
Zhuang Zhou heard of their views and delighted in them. (Watson 2013: 295–6)

Thus, according to the author of the chapter “The World,” Zhuangzi holds that there is no constant in all changes and transformations.

It should be pointed out here that Zhuangzi takes all the instances of change 變 in the world, or in the grand process of change, to be instances of transformation 化. Zhuangzi already speaks of the transformation of things in the chapter “Discussion on making all things equal” of the “Inner Chapters” frequently. For instance, the famous butterfly and dream story emphasizes the notion of the transformation of things:

Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn’t know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called *the Transformation of Things* [此之謂物化]. (Watson 2013: 18; emphasis mine)

In the chapter “Knowledge Wandered North 知北遊” from the “Outer Chapters,” the author employs the notion of *qi* 氣 (breath) to characterize the idea of the transformation of all things:

Man’s life is a coming-together of breath [氣 *qi*]. If it comes together, there is life; if it scatters, there is death. And if life and death are companions to each other, then what is there for us to be anxious about?

“The ten thousand things are really one. We look on some as beautiful because they are rare or unearthly; we look on others as ugly because they are foul and rotten. But the foul and rotten may turn into the rare and unearthly, and the rare and unearthly may turn into the foul and rotten. So it is said, You have only to comprehend the one breath that is the world [通天下一氣耳]. The sage never ceases to value oneness.” (Watson 2013: 177)

In other words, the coming into being or nonbeing of things solely consists in the gathering and scattering of *qi*. That is the transformation of *qi*, if we adopt the widely accepted understanding of the notion of transformation. The widely accepted understanding of transformation is best defined by this passage from the Book 22 “On the Correct Use of Names 正名篇” of the *Xunzi*:

Where the appearance undergoes metamorphosis [狀變], but there is no distinction in the reality [實 *shi*], yet they are deemed different, it is called “transformation [化 *hua*].” (Knoblock 1999: 717)

Accordingly, as the coming into being or nonbeing of things consists in the gathering and scattering of *qi*, it belongs to the grand process of the transformation of the one *qi* 一氣 of the Heaven and Earth 天下. It follows that, for Zhuangzi, the grand process of change in the world is simply the grand process of transformation of all things in the world.

It is then shown that when the author of the chapter “The World” says that Zhuangzi holds that there is no constant in all changes and transformations, this can be taken to mean that there is no constant *in all transformations*. In other words, Zhuangzi holds that there isn't the *dao* if the *dao* is understood as the invariant under all changes. The fact that Zhuangzi holds such a view is directly supported by the following passage from the chapter “The Great and Venerable Teacher 大宗師” of the “Inner Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi*:

Confucius said, “If you're identical with it, you must have no more likes! *If you've been transformed, you must have no more constancy* [化則無常也]! So you really are a worthy man after all! With your permission, I'd like to become your follower.” (Watson 2013: 53; emphasis mine)

It is from the larger context of this passage that the view expressed in what Confucius said to Yan Hui is positively adopted by the author of the *Zhuangzi*. In particular, it follows from such a view that transformation implies invariance (no constancy). Therefore, Zhuangzi would hold that there is no constant or invariant under all transformations, and thus there isn't the *dao* understood as the invariant under all transformations.

There is, however, a second and also popular meaning of the notion of *dao* in ancient China. According to this meaning of *dao*, the *dao* is the totality of all things. I have argued elsewhere (Cheung 2017) that, as mentioned by the passage from the chapter “The World” of the *Zhuangzi* quoted above, Laozi employs various notions, including that of emptiness and being, to characterize the *dao* understood as the totality of all things. The following is just one of the various passages in the *Daodejing* that characterizes the *dao* as the totality of all things:

We look at it and do not see it; Its name is The Invisible [夷 *yi*]. We listen to it and do not hear it; Its name is The Inaudible [希 *xi*]. We touch it and do not find it; Its name is The Subtle (formless) [微 *wei*]. These three cannot be further inquired into, And hence merge into one. Going up high, it is not bright, and coming down low, it is not dark. Infinite and boundless, it cannot be given any name; It reverts to nothingness. This is called shape without shape, Form without objects. It is The Vague and Elusive. Meet it and you will not see its head. Follow it and you will not see its back... (Chan 1963: 124)

I have argued in (Cheung 2017) that the above is one of several passages from the *Daodejing*, where Laozi characterizes the *dao* as what I call “a nonempty transforming unsummed totality.” For instance, what does “Meet it and you will not see its head. Follow it and you will not see its back” mean? The answer is this: *Because you form a part of dao!* You are “within” *dao*, and that is why you meet it but cannot see its head, and you follow it but can't see its rear. *The dao* is a totality, which includes you and I.

With respect to the second meaning of the notion of *dao*, Zhuangzi holds a view about the *dao* similar to that of Laozi this time. Zhuangzi holds that there is the *dao* understood as what is, so to speak, “constituted” by the totality of all things. The following passage from the chapter “Knowledge Wandered North 知北遊” characterizes the *dao* in terms of the notions of “completeness 周,” “universality 遍,” and “all-inclusiveness 咸” explicitly:

Master Tung-kuo asked Chuang Tzu, “This thing called the Way - where does it exist?”

Chuang Tzu said, “There’s no place it doesn’t exist.”

“Come,” said Master Tung-kuo, “you must be more specific!”

“It is in the ant.”

“As low a thing as that?”

“It is in the panic grass.”

“But that’s lower still!”

“It is in the tiles and shards.”

“How can it be so low?”

“It is in the piss and shit!”

Master Tung-kuo made no reply.

Chuang Tzu said, “Sir, your questions simply don’t get at the substance of the matter. When Inspector Huo asked the superintendent of the market how to test the fatness of a pig by pressing it with the foot, he was told that the lower down on the pig you press, the nearer you come to the truth. But *you must not expect to find the Way [dao] in any particular place - there is no thing that escapes its presence!* Such is the Perfect Way, and so too are the truly great words. ‘Complete,’ ‘universal,’ ‘all-inclusive’ - *these three are different words with the same meaning. All point to a single reality.* [周遍咸三者，異名同實，其指一也。] (Watson 2013: 182; emphasis mine.)

Accordingly, Zhuangzi holds that the *dao* exhibits its presence everywhere, and that it can be described, or descriptively characterized, as what is complete, universal and all-inclusive, which point to a single reality. This shows that the notion of the *dao* here is understood by Zhuangzi as the totality of all things, and also that, unlike the case of the *dao* understood as the invariant under all transformations, he accepts that there is the *dao* as the totality of all things.

## 4 Watching the Process of the Transformation of All Things

In both the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, there are depictions of the activity of comprehending the *dao* by watching 觀 the grand process of the changes of all things. For instance, in Chapter 16 of the *Daodejing*, Laozi describes how the activity of watching the reversion of all things is carried out:

Attain complete vacuity,



Maintain steadfast quietude.

All things come into being,

And *I see thereby their return* [吾以觀復<sup>5</sup>].

All things flourish,

But each one returns to its root.

This return to its root means *tranquility* [常; constant].

It is called returning to its destiny.

To return to destiny is called the eternal (Tao [*dao*]).

To know the eternal is called the enlightenment.

Not to know the eternal is to act blindly to result in disaster.

He who knows the eternal is all-embracing.

Being all-embracing, he is impartial.

Being impartial, he is kingly (universal).

Being kingly, he is one with Nature.

Being one with Nature, he is in accord with Tao [*dao*].

Being in accord with Tao [*dao*], he is everlasting,

And is free from danger throughout his lifetime. (Chan 1963: 147–8; emphasis mine.)

Laozi is describing here how the sage grasps the *dao* as the constant 常, or the invariant, by watching 觀 the grand process of the change of all things in the world. The invariant under all changes in this case is the way of the return or reversion 復.

The *Zhuangzi* also depicts the watching of the grand process of the transformation of all things in the world. One such passage is the following one from the chapter “Perfect Happiness” of the “Outer Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi*, which has already been quoted before. But let me quote it again here:

Uncle Lack-Limb and Uncle Lame-Gait were seeing the sights at Dark Lord Hill and the wastes of Kunlun, the place where the Yellow Emperor rested. Suddenly a willow sprouted out of Uncle Lame-Gait's left elbow. He looked very startled and seemed to be annoyed.

“Do you resent it?” said Uncle Lack-Limb.

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<sup>5</sup> All the Chinese quotations of the *Daodejing* are from Yu (1973).

“No—what is there to resent?” said Uncle Lam-Gait. “To live is to borrow. And if we borrow to live, then life must be a pile of trash. Life and death are day and night. *You and I came to watch 觀 the process of change [化; transformation], and now change [化; transformation] has caught up with me. Why would I have anything to resent?*” (Watson 2013: 141; emphasis mine.)

Here, the author is describing how the two (Uncles Lack-Limb and Lam-Gait) are watching (觀) the grand process of the transformation of all things in the world. Note that they do not grasp the *dao* as the constant, or the invariant, under all those transformations, as Zhuangzi does not believe that there is any invariant under transformation. What they do observe about the *dao* here is the *dao* as it is immanent in or identifiable with the world as a whole (as a nonempty transforming unsummed totality). Besides this, the passage also tells us that Uncle Lam-Gait observes the participation of the “I” as the body, and not the True Master, in the process of the transformation of all things.

This should be read alongside with the passage from the chapter “Zeyang” of the “Miscellaneous Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi* quoted above already. Let me quote it again here:

(The sovereign) Zan-hsiang was possessed of that central principle round which all things revolve, and by it he could follow them to their completion. His accompanying them had neither ending nor beginning, and was independent of impulse or time. *Daily he witnessed their changes, and himself underwent no change* [日與物化者, 一不化者也]; and why should he not have rested in this? (Legge 1959: 557; emphasis mine.)

It is now clear that Zhuangzi holds that although the “I” as the body does participate in the process of transformation, the “I” as the True Master doesn’t. Nevertheless, the True Master can have the relationship of watching 觀 with the world as the grand process of the transformation of all things. As I shall argue next, the True Master can also ascribe the first person perspective onto the world, and yet such an act of ascription is nothing more than the establishment of the relationship of watching, and does not affect the process of transformation in the world at all. One may say, the True Master is *transcendental* in the sense that it governs, and influences, one’s engagement in the process of the transformation of all things in the world *without itself participating in the process of transformation*.

## 5 The Engagement of the True Master in the World

In what sense, according to Zhuangzi, does the True Master govern, and influence, one’s engagement in the process of the transformation of all things in the world *without itself participating in the process of transformation*? First of all, Zhuangzi holds that values do not reside in things, nor in the grand process of the transformation of all things, and that they are conferred onto the world by the True Master. This can be seen from various passages in the *Zhuangzi*. The following passage from the chapter “Discussion on making all things equal” is one of those:

But to wear out your brain trying to make things into one without realizing that they are all the same - this is called "three in the morning." What do I mean by "three in the morning"? When the monkey trainer was handing out acorns, he said, "You get three in the morning and four at night." This made all the monkeys furious. "Well, then," he said, "you get four in the morning and three at night." The monkeys were all delighted. *There was no change in the reality behind the words, and yet the monkeys responded with joy and anger* [名實未虧而喜怒為用]. Let them, if they want to. So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer. This is called walking two roads. (Watson 2013: 11; emphasis mine.)

The True Master (of any of those monkeys) can see getting three in the morning and four at night as something worthy of being delighted, while getting four in the morning and three at night something worthy of being furious. But actually the reality behind the different words "three in the morning and four at night" and "four in the morning and three at night" are one and the same reality. There is no difference of values (causing joy and anger, respectively) in reality, or in the *dao*. In other words, the *dao* as a nonempty transforming unsummed totality in itself does not involve any values. Value is what is conferred, or ascribed, onto the world by the True Master, who also can confer the first person perspective onto the world.

Another piece of textual evidence is the following passage, which is also from the chapter "Discussion on making all things equal:"

Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn't there? What does the Way [the *dao*] rely upon, that we have true and false? What do words rely upon, that we have right and wrong? How can the Way go away and not exist? How can words exist and not be acceptable? *When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Moists*. What one calls right the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong the other calls right. But if we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity. (Watson 2013: 9–10; emphasis mine.)

This passage also tells us, amongst other things, that the difference in value judgement between the Confucians and the Moists has no reality in the *dao*, or in the grand process of the transformation of all things. The apparent, but not genuine, difference is caused by the True Masters of the Confucians and the Moists conferring different values to things, respectively.

In fact, not only matters concerning values and value judgements, but also matters concerning facts and factual judgements have no reality in the *dao*, and were conferred onto the world by the acts of the relevant True Masters. This can be seen from, for example, the following passage from the chapter "Autumn Floods 秋水" of the "Outer Chapters" of the *Zhuangzi*:

Ruo of the North Sea said, "*From the point of view of the Way [the *dao*], things have no nobility or meanness*. From the point of view of things themselves, each regards itself as noble and other things as mean. From the point of view of common opinion, nobility and meanness are not determined by the individual himself.

“From the point of view of differences, if we regard a thing as big because there is a certain bigness to it, then among all the ten thousand things there are none that are not big. If we regard a thing as small because there is a certain smallness to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not small. If we know that heaven and earth are tiny grains and the tip of a hair is a range of mountains, then we have perceived the law of difference.

“From the point of view of function, if we regard a thing as useful because there is a certain usefulness to it, then among all the ten thousand things there are none that are not useful. If we regard a thing as useless because there is a certain uselessness to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not useless. If we know that east and west are mutually opposed but that one cannot do without the other, then we can estimate the degree of function.

“From the point of view of preference, if we regard a thing as right because there is a certain right to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not right. *If we regard a thing as wrong because there is a certain wrong to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not wrong.* (Watson 2013: 129–30; emphasis mine.)

This passage first says that “from the point of view of the Way [the *dao*], things have no nobility or meanness.” Thus, if the True Master sees things from the point of view of the *dao*, there are no right or wrong, not just in matters of ethics, but also in matters of facts. That is why the author says, through Ruo, that “[i]f we regard a thing as wrong because there is a certain wrong to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not wrong.”

Of course, Zhuangzi does not recommend us to employ the True Master to see things from the ways of differences, function or preference. If one really employs her True Master to see things from any of those ways, her True Master would become what Zhuangzi calls “[the] minds draw near to death 近死之心” (Watson 2013: 8) in the chapter “Discussion on making all things equal.” Zhuangzi’s recommendation can be found in the following passage from the “The Sign of Virtue Complete 德充符” of the “Inner Chapters.”

Confucius said, “Life and death are great affairs, and yet they are no change to him. Though heaven and earth flop over and fall down, it is no loss to him. *He sees clearly into what has no falsehood and does not shift with things. He takes it as fate that things should change, and he holds fast to the source.*”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Chang Ji.

Confucius said, “If you look at them from the point of view of their differences, then there is liver and gall, Chu and Yue. But if you look at them from the point of view of their sameness, then the ten thousand things are all one. A man like this doesn’t know what his ears or eyes should approve - he lets his mind play in the harmony of virtue. As for things, he sees them as one and does not see their loss. He regards the loss of a foot as a lump of earth thrown away.” (Watson 2013: 34–5; emphasis mine.)

Zhuangzi’s recommendation is therefore that one’s True Master should see “clearly into what has no falsehood and does not shift with things. He takes it as fate that things should change, and he holds fast to the source.” In other words, the True

Master should not participate in the grand process of the transformation of all things (that is, should not shift with things), but should take the process of transformation to be sheer contingency (that is, to be fate). In this way, the True Master can hold fast to its own source—the one who confers the first person perspective, values and factual judgements onto the world, that is, herself—and would not slip into the grand process of the transformation of all things.

It has now been explained in what sense, according to Zhuangzi, the True Master is *transcendental*. The True Master is transcendental such that it is the agent who confers the first person perspective, governs and influences her engagement in the process of the transformation of all things in the world, and yet be independent of the world in the sense that it never really participates in the process of transformation. The True Master is therefore not a thing, nor a fact, “in” the world. It is a being “outside” the world, and yet it is capable of conferring the first person perspective, and governing and influencing her engagement in the process of transformation by means of the relationship of ‘watching’ holding between it and the world. The latter, that is, the watching relationship, never transforms anything, and never contributes anything to the process of the transformation of things in the world.

## 6 A Wittgensteinian Investigation

According to the *Zhuangzi*, the True Master is the transcendental agent in the sense that she confers the first person perspective, governs and influences her engagement in the process of the transformation of all things, and yet she does not participate in the process of transformation. The True Master is not a thing, nor a fact, “in” the world. What can the True Master be? What does it mean to be something which influences the world and yet doesn't belong to the world?

Suppose we want to use a linguistic term to talk about the True Master. The most appropriate term does not seem to be “the True Master,” but rather the first person pronoun “I,” because the True Master is taken to be the agent who confers the first person perspective onto the world, though it itself does not belong to the world. Now we know that the personal pronoun in the *Zhuangzi* is the word “吾” and not “我.” Two instances of such a use are in the sentences “吾喪我” (I have lost myself) and “吾與子觀化而化及我” (You and I came to watch the process of change, and now change has caught up with me) examined above.

An interesting question that arises immediately is this: *Is a language in which the first personal pronoun “吾 (I)” is employed to refer to the True Master possible?* In what follows, I shall employ a Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation of the use of the word “吾” or, rather, “I” (for the sake of convenience) in the ordinary contexts of using English (as the ordinary language). The objective is to check if it is possible for the word “I” to be used to refer to the True Master. The result of the investigation, as I shall argue, is that the word “I” cannot be used in ordinary linguistic contexts to refer to the True Master, or that such a linguistic context is still lacking. Consequently, the notion of the True Master as something conferring the first

personal perspective onto the world, and influencing the process of the transformation of all things, without itself being part of the world is, or remains, unintelligible.

A point of departure of the grammatical investigation is to try to imagine a linguistic context in which the word “I” can be used to refer to the True Master meaningfully. (Of course, the “appropriate use” of the term “I” in any such linguistic context imagined would be shown to be only apparent later.) Actually, in many ordinary linguistic contexts, we use the word “I” meaningfully in significant sentences such as “I see an apple on the table,” “I see the blue sky” and “I see that this is a picture of a duck” (while looking at the famous duck-rabbit picture first published in the Magazine *Fliegende Blätter* in 1892). The fact that we can use these sentences significantly seems to suggest that one always sees the world with a first person perspective. There is a personal or, so to speak, “private” point of view according to which one sees or watches the world. It also suggests to philosophers such as Zhuangzi that the “I” in, say, the significant sentence “I see an apple on the table” refers to a subject which can confer the first perspective onto the world, influence her engagement in the process of transformation of things in the world by watching the world, and yet it itself does not belong to the world. That the latter point is the case because there is no way in the world where one can find or locate



the I, the True Master.

This way of thinking is very similar to that of the solipsist Wittgenstein considers in his early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (hereafter “the *Tractatus*”). The solipsist there claims that “I am my world” (TLP 5.63)<sup>6</sup> or that “[t]he world and life are one” (TLP 5.621). According to the solipsist, the “I” in the sentence “I am my world” does not refer to anything in, or any part of, the world, even though the I does confer the first person perspective onto the world. That is why one cannot find or locate the I in the world, as explained by Wittgenstein brilliantly in TLP 5.631:

There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.

If I wrote a book called *The World as I found it*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book.—

This suggests to philosophers such as Zhuangzi that the word “I” in “I see an apple on the table” does refer to a first person perspective conferring agent who does not reside in the world—that is, the True Master. One who adopts such a view also

<sup>6</sup>Here, I follow the usual practice of employing ‘TLP’ as the abbreviation for ‘*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*’ and referring to the propositions of the *Tractatus* by the relevant numerical indexes.

would take the I, or the True Master, to be the viewer, or the eye (or eyes), analogously here. Of course, she would not take the eye here as the physical eye or anything, or any fact, in the world. This is very similar to what the following entries TLP 5.633–5.6331 say about the metaphysical subject, which can be taken to be the True Master of the solipsist:

Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?

You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye.

And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye. (TLP 5.633)

For the form of the visual field is surely not like this

(TLP 5.6331)

Because one cannot locate the viewer in the visual field, the viewer must lie outside the visual field and yet confers the first person perspective onto things she sees, or onto the visual field. Actually, although Wittgenstein as the author of the *Tractatus* does not endorse solipsism, he holds that pointing out the nonsensicality of the solipsist's thesis would bring the philosophical self into philosophy as the limit of the world (shown by the world as a whole):

Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way.

What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that 'the world is my world'.

The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it. (TLP 5.641)

The above discussions explain how philosophers such as Zhuangzi and the solipsist in the *Tractatus* get to the point that the "I" in "I see an apple on the table" refers to the True Master or the metaphysical subject which confers the first person perspective onto, and yet does not reside in, the world.

However, Wittgenstein would think that it does not follow from the fact that the referent of the word "I" in "I see an apple on the table" cannot be found inside the world, nor in the grand process of the transformation of all things, that it must be something that lies outside the world. But, rather, he would argue, it follows from such a fact that the rules of the use of the word "I" cannot be construed on the "designation and object" model. If so, even if the True Master were a metaphysical or, rather, transcendental subject who confers the first person perspective onto the world and yet does not belong to the world, the True Master cannot contribute anything to the proper significant uses of the word "I" in sentential contexts such as that in "I see an apple on the table."

My claim that Wittgenstein would think so is based on the fact that he has put forward a very similar argument when he attacks the view of taking sensations such as pain to be private objects. Let me explain his argument now.



In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein has carried out a grammatical investigation of the sensation word “pain.” One of the purposes of the grammatical investigation is to attack the view of taking pain to be a private object in the sense of being an object which is unobservable empirically. He employs the famous beetle analogy to make the point that the grammar of the word “pain,” or the rules governing the use of the word “pain,” cannot be construed on the “object and designation” model:

If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word “pain” means—must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the *one* case so irresponsibly?

Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case! Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a “beetle”. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word “beetle” had a use in these people’s language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty.—No, one can ‘divide through’ by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant. ... (PI § 293)<sup>7</sup>

The point here is that even if pain were a private object, it would not contribute anything to the proper uses of the word “pain” in the appropriate sentential contexts. It follows that no word would have been able to be used to refer to pain as a private object. As a result, the notion of pain as a private object is unintelligible or yet to be made to be intelligible.

A similar argument is applicable to the case of the True Master, and shows that even if there were the True Master, the very ordinary word “I” commonly used in significant sentences such as “I see an apple on the table” cannot be used to refer to the True Master, despite the fact that it appears to be able to do so. The rules governing the use of the word “I” in appropriate sentential contexts simply cannot be construed based on the “designation and object” model. Therefore, the notion of the I as the True Master is unintelligible or yet to be made to be intelligible.

However, why do philosophers such as Zhuangzi and the solipsist think that the True Master or the metaphysical subject can be referred to linguistically by means of the word “I” in the appropriate sentential contexts, respectively? The answer can be found by first considering how Wittgenstein explains why some philosophers would take pain to be a private object. Suppose that a person is in pain and also exhibits certain pain behaviors, such as crying. Those pain behaviors are observed publicly. But the pain is nowhere publicly observable. This may have prompted those philosophers to think that, because there are those pain behaviors, there must

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<sup>7</sup>I follow the usual practice of referring to the passages in Part I of the *Philosophical Investigations* not by their page numbers, but by their section numbers.

be the pain; and even though the pain cannot be observed publicly, it must be somewhere. Thence comes the picture of pain being an inner private object, and they were held captive by such a picture. The unintelligible philosophical idea of pain's being a private object is a consequence of their being held captive by the picture, which is a philosophical confusion.

## 7 Conclusion

A similar explanation is applicable to the case of the True Master as well. Philosophers such as Zhuangzi found that there is always the first person perspective in one's watching the process of transformation of all things in the world and in one's conferring value and factual judgements onto the world. For example, when I see an apple on the table, there is always a point of view, a perspective, from which I see the apple on the table. Thus, there must be the I as the True Master or the viewer. However, even though whatever I see is in the world, the I, the viewer, itself cannot be found there. This very probably has misled Zhuangzi to think that since there must be the I or the True Master, the True Master must reside somewhere as something, or an object, which does not belong to the world. One may say, Zhuangzi was also seized or held captive by a certain picture of the True Master as something transcendental, which is basically a philosophical confusion. It is one of the consequences of such a philosophical confusion that gives rise to the unintelligible, or yet to be made intelligible, philosophical idea of the True Master as a transcendental subject "outside" the world.

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